



LISBETH WILSON

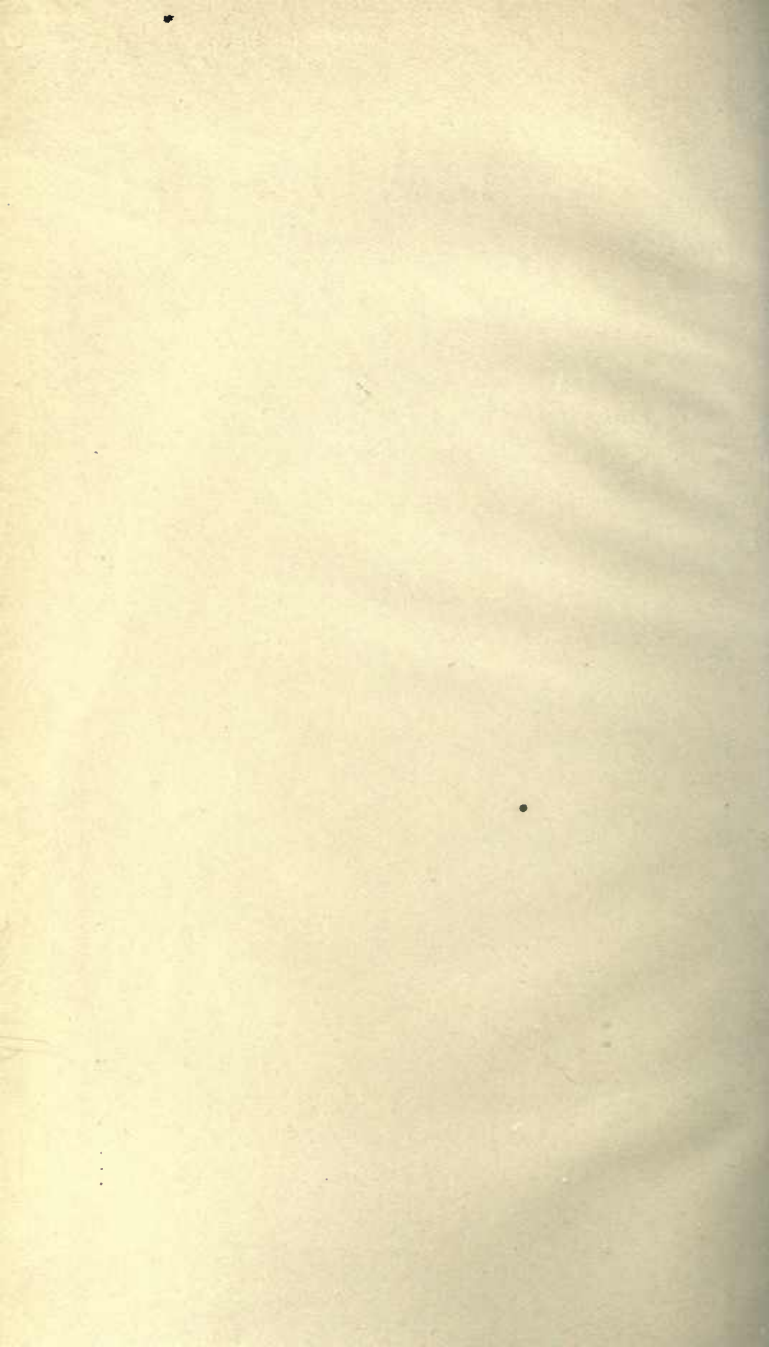
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LISBETH WILSON

A DAUGHTER

OF

NEW HAMPSHIRE HILLS

BY

ELIZA NELSON BLAIR

LEE AND SHEPARD PUBLISHERS

10 MILK STREET

BOSTON

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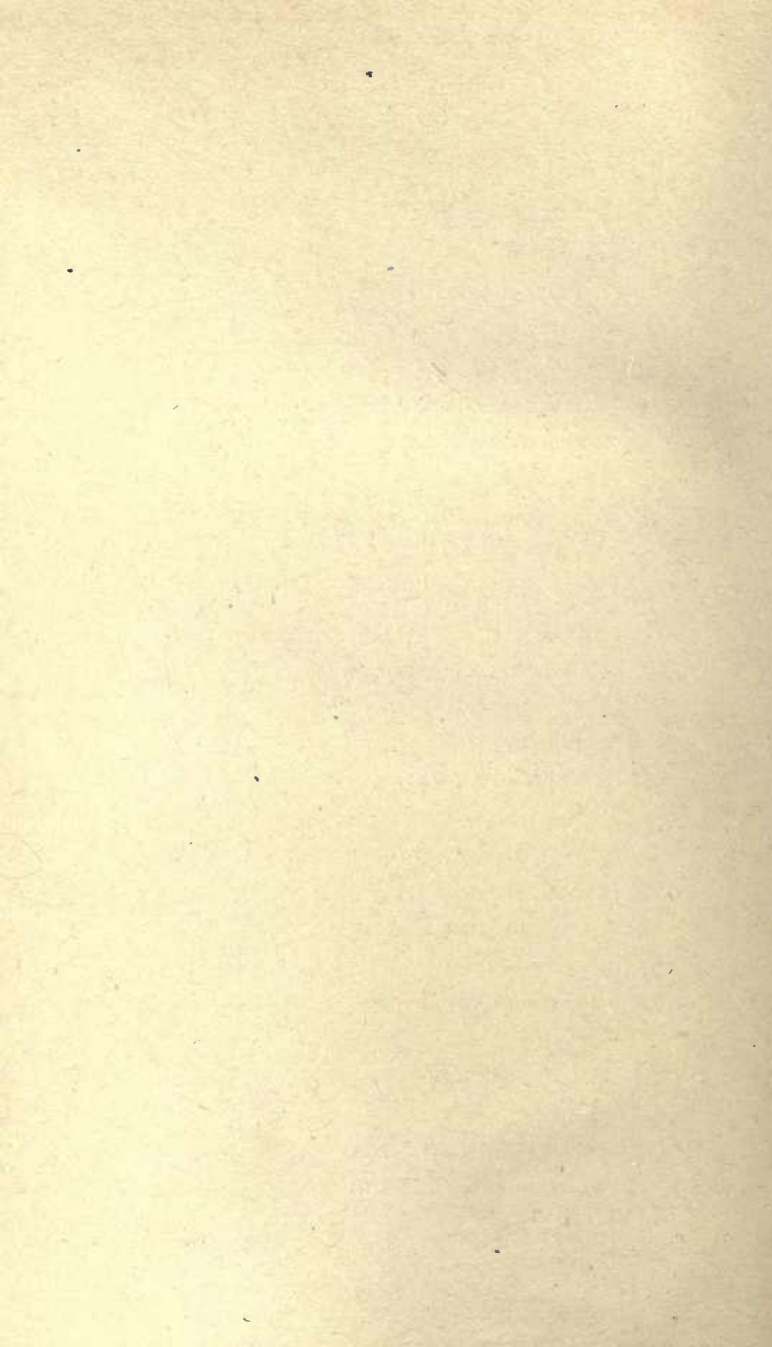
TO
MY HUSBAND

WHOSE LIFE IN PEACE AND WAR HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THE
HONOR AND SERVICE OF THE DEAR
OLD STATE ; AND TO

MY SON

THIS STORY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE IS INSCRIBED

E. N. B.



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'LISBETH WILSON

CHAPTER I

A DAUGHTER OF NEW HAMPSHIRE HILLS

UP in northern New Hampshire, on a delightful April morning of the sweet old days, a rosy child, with spring-time buoyancy in every motion, climbed over the stone steps of a wall close by a pair of bars, sprang with a hop, skip, and jump across a road, by a garden, to the front door of a house, turned, and watched a flock of sheep which she had just fed with corn and beans. One red-mittened hand held a wooden measure carelessly by its brim.

She was Dorothy Wilson, seven years old, daughter to Thomas Wilson and his wife Martha, who owned the dwelling and farm around it.

Curling locks of brown hair showed under a quilted red hood. Her long, full cloak of black-and-white checked flannel was gathered into a yoke around the shoulders. It blew back, disclosing a wine-colored flannel gown and blue linen tier. Pantalets like the dress touched the instep of her high leather bootees.

The unpainted house behind her was built at a fork of roads, well back from each. It was large, double, substantial, and faced south. It was slightly lapped on its northern side by a low shed, which ran easterly nearly to one road.

The great woodyard, in the angle formed by the gable-end of the house and the shed, had a couple of ox-sleds on its carpet of chips, and an ox-yoke or two lying about.

Jack and Tom Wilson, aged eleven and nine years respectively, sat on a sled-tongue. One divided sweet elder sticks a foot long, grooved each half of them by removing the pith, and whittled one end to fit a three-quarter-inch augur-hole, thus making sap-spiles for maple-trees. The other was mending a pair of old trucks, and both were whistling.

At the woodpile the hired man, Mr. Tyrrell, was riving tough-grained logs with beetle and wedge, and keeping an eye on the boys.

On the westerly side of the house two barns were joined together by a shed. The lower or little one was thickly plastered by swallows' nests, till that morning bare and untenanted.

Close by Dorothy's feet some robins were pulling at a string to put into the foundations of a nest, and a pair of pewees chattered in the blue-damson tree on the other side of the front yard.

The door behind Dorothy opened; and another girl, seemingly twenty years old, came forth, saying,—

"Grained the sheep, Dorothy? How summery it is out here!"

"Yes, 'Lisbeth. Pussy-willows are out by the brook. Can't we hunt them?"

"No; mother needs me to sew on the boys' spencers. The hills and woods are coming alive, Dorothy. See! right here grass is pushing up by the banking, and there's more out by the clumps of lilacs and roses."

Her voice was full and sweet, her complexion the hue of pale mayflowers. She had a fine low forehead, rather heavy, but well-curved brows, deep sapphire eyes. Steady, faithful, righteously proud eyes they were.

Her nose was delicate, mouth large but sweet, chin too strong for beauty, yet curving exquisitely to the perfect throat. She was tall, slender, with beautifully rounded muscles, which were almost as firm as her brothers'.

In body, mind, and spirit a consummate blossom hanging to the healthful, if somewhat thorny, stem of a new and imperial civilization.

This girl was 'Lisbeth Wilson, christened stately, queenly Elizabeth, but the name shortened and made practical after the manner of her day and generation.

Her dress was woollen, colored like Dorothy's, well-fitted, edged at the neck with a white linen ruffle.

The child's feet ached to be off as she complained, —

"I want to go. Do come, 'Lisbeth."

The boys' jack-knives clicked, and Tom called out as they ran to her,—

"Yes, 'Lisbeth, do go. Let's have some fun. It's awful poky makin' spiles and fixin' old trucks. Mebby we'll catch a woodchuck."

"Huh!" said Jack. "Woodchucks! Wait till they're thawed."

"Look at the little barn!" said 'Lisbeth eagerly. "See! a swallow! and they keep coming."

Sure enough, the advance guard of thousands that moment arrived, and twittered full of glee among the brown nests.

"Jack, come back to these spiles," called Mr. Tyrrell.

"Oh, I hate 'em! 'Lisbeth, won't you go?"

"No, boys; mother cannot spare me, and you must go back to work."

They must needs be satisfied, for obedience was ingrained; so they returned to spiles and trucks; but she rested a hand on the little maid's shoulder, and watched the hills and cloud shadows flying over them.

Like hundreds of others in the State, that landscape in the south-west corner of Plymouth did "snatch a grace beyond the reach of art." Eastward a highway came down the schoolhouse hill (which was only a ridge), crossed a brook, passed over a short level, then ran behind the woodpile, and came out and disappeared down the little barn hill.

Southerly beyond the dooryard was a garden, then the road, with a field beyond, where lambs were skipping and sheep sedately crunched their grain. The field sloped gently down to a meadow a quarter of a mile distant, where, among reddish-brown knolls, they caught the glimmer of a little trout-brook, as it hurried its swollen current into the woods below the meadow.

The forest of mixed hardwood and evergreen trees skirted the lowland all its length, and climbed in a zig-zag way partly up to the long, undulating summit of Smith Hill, one of the Bridgewater range. Easterly Smith Hill ran into descending spurs of Plymouth Mountain; westerly it fell abruptly to the Pond.

Its north-western shoulder slanted gently toward them down to a sun-blessed valley of a few acres between it and the woods, which small plat of ground made Mr. Moses' farm, whose weather-beaten buildings were nearly on a level with the Wilsons', but the two dwellings that dotted the summit of Smith Hill were considerably higher. One house was owned by Ephraim Smith, the other by his Cousin John.

Rippling at the foot of the hills, and sparkling northward to Hebron, lay Newfound Lake, spoken of by all inhabitants of the region round about as "The Pond."

They saw where Sugarloaf almost marked its northern bound, monarch of the attending line of low peaks that girt its thither shore. From the foot of the Pond, clearing it like a wedge wide at the base and narrow at the

head, and equally dividing its waters, the woody "Point" reached nearly half-way to Hebron. Across the lake, and below it, tier on tier of hills and mountains rose. They saw where Kearsarge turned his face to the morning; and way down in the southwest, on the horizon's outmost brim, Monadnock's seamed and grand old forehead was flushed with sunlight.

Their dreamy silence was interrupted by the sound of spirited steps crushing delicate veils of ice over tiny hollows in the road behind the shed; and immediately a trim, slight woman of medium height and middle age came into view round the shed. Dorothy ran to meet her.

"Morning, Dorothy," was her greeting. "How's your folks?"

While speaking she pushed a long, figured, black-lace veil to one side of her black-silk bonnet, which was Quaker-shaped, lined with dove-colored silk, slightly wadded, and tied under her chin by ribbon of the same shade.

She uncovered a strong, thoughtful face, firm mouth, gray eyes, and soft, light-brown hair combed carefully smooth.

"Our folks are well, Mis' Lane. Come in, 'Lisbeth's here."

Mrs. Lane looked gently down on the younger girl, then up to the smiling elder one.

"Why, 'Lisbeth! You to home?"

"Yes; do come in."

"There! I must for a minit; but don't ask me to stay, for I can't, nohow. I'm going to see if Mis' King will swap some yarn with me."

Dorothy ran before them through front door and entry into the east room, where Grandmother Wilson sat in a high, handmade rocker, painted black, with gilt lines, a gilt cobweb pattern on its crescent-shaped top. A snuff-box and some knitting lay on her apron while she read.

She raised her eyes from an open Bible, and pushed a pair of glasses above her cap-border as Mrs. Lane entered.

She was a large, imperious woman, with black eyes, sharp nose, strong chin. A stiff, double-quilled cap-frill close about her face bristled with authority. One quickly saw there could be no compromise with that cap-border. But she was a noble and fitting picture in that quaint room, with white curtains drawn aside from small-paned windows; a tall clock in one corner, a dreamy fire in the wide fireplace, a mahogany table between the south windows; chairs standing here and there upon the shining yellow floor; and a braided mat, bright with color, before the brick hearth and polished andirons.

"How d'ye do?" cheerfully inquired Mrs. Lane.

"Kinder middlin', Mis' Lane. Feel the spring some. We'll go into the kitchen 'long of Thomas's wife an' Lettice."

A pale, sweet-voiced woman rose to receive them, laying some sewing down upon a round red table as she spoke.

"Why, Mis' Lane, this is a real treat! Take a chair; set right down. I know you've come for a good visit."

"No, I haven't. I'm going down to Mis' King's of an errant."

"Oh, set down," pleaded Mrs. Wilson. "It's early. Stop a spell. 'Lisbeth, take Mis' Lane's things."

Mrs. Lane glanced at the clock.

"Only nine — 'tis early. I guess I'll stay an hour or so."

She gave her things to 'Lisbeth, sat down, and took some knitting from a wicker basket, casting a look of neighborly approval round the neat kitchen. It went the length of the house, except entry, cellarway, and pantry at one end, and a small bedroom at the other.

Doors from fore-room and east room opened into it, and a fireplace occupied half the south wall, and heavy brands flamed between its great andirons. Above them, on a crane among hooks and links, an iron teakettle lazily gurgled; and over the fireplace earthen milk-pans, candlesticks, and snuffers sat on the high mantle-tree. The oven and jack-table were on one side of it, a stone hearth for waiting backlog and forestick on the other. A dark-blue dresser, prettily chamfered, and painted Indian red behind the shelves, made the west wall; and its broad shelf over cupboards held pewter-

ware. On higher and narrower ones clustered cups and saucers; bowls and dishes of old blue china sat before standing lines of platters and plates; and on the highest of all perched sugar-loaves, each sheathed in blue paper, some bottles containing ox-gall, medicamentum, aloes, balm of gilead, and other simple medicines steeped from roots and herbs, combined with "rum enough to keep 'em."

The dusky north wall was carpentered out of matched pine boards. It was broken by two windows looking on the orchard, and decked with yarn reels, an extra wheel head or two, some wheel fingers, a distaff and fliers, several pairs of cards, traces of seed-corn, and a dark-yellow pumpkin-shell full of garden-seeds.

The well-room door opened by the pantry.

"Where's Lettice?" inquired Mrs. Lane, after a few general remarks.

"In the butt'ry; she's baking this morning." Just then that handmaiden appeared.

"Oh! it's Mis' Lane," she exclaimed. "I can't stop tew speak. I'm afraid my things is brownd tew much a'ready. Mr. Ward, he's comin' out tew visit members to-morrer, — can't see what he takes sech awful dewin' for; but I 'spect it's ole Mis' Moses, they hain't looked for her tew winter, — an if he lives tew get here, we lay out he'll have a good dinner, if I dew say it."

All the while she drew from the oven, with a great

long-handled shovel, baking-pans full of dainty brown tarts and caraway cookies.

Then she squinted hard at the clock and spoke to Mrs. Wilson.

"These punkin pies air about the right color, — they've been in a good hour."

Mrs. Wilson nodded; and she slid them, brownish-yellow and delicious, from shovel to jack-table.

They visited for an hour, asking after neighbors, considering lathes, reeds, harnesses, and other loom-gear, the fineness of linen warp and filling for different cloths, the stores of woven goods, and so on, and ended by examining 'Lisbeth's new dove-colored bombazine dress.

"For the 'Cademy exhibition," Lettice remarked.

"It's real soft and and nice, I'm sure, an' 'twill be becomin'," confidently asserted Mrs. Lane, adding, "there! I should like to stay all day, but I must do that errand to Mis' King's; and I don't know when Loizy or I can get out of our house again — spring work is coming on so."

CHAPTER II

WHICH MAY BE SKIPPED

BEFORE Mrs. Lane could roll up her knitting and rise from her chair the well-room door opened, admitting a man, tall, firmly knit, whose keen gray eyes lighted a smooth firm face, every line of which betokened intelligence, self-reliance, authority.

He was Thomas Wilson, 'Lisbeth's father, of direct Puritan blood and creed. He inherited himself, so to speak, and rejoiced in flawless heirship to that temporal and spiritual dominion which belonged to his race.

As his lights revealed justice and truth to him, so he illustrated them. According to ministerial parlance he was "an exemplary man."

A quick smile revealed an unexpected gentleness as he spoke: —

"Mornin', Mis' Lane; I've just sent one of the boys up to your house after a ploughnose."

"Dear me! I don't know what men folks are made of. If I've spoke of that once, I have a dozen times. Only t'other day I saw it in the arm of a brace, in our shed; and I says to Mr. Lane, says I, 'It's most time for spring ploughing, and you better send that nose home.'"

"'Taint no matter, Mis' Lane; we borrowed his harrer last fall when we seeded the ridge to clover, an' it's in our shed chamber now. Mother," he added, turning to his wife, "I've been pickin' rocks, and runnin' roun' 'bout fencin', an' pacin' off a potater field, till I'm gaunt as a greyhoun'."

"Lettice," called his wife.

"Yes, ma'am," came from the pantry.

"Father wants a bite, and we'll all take a cup of tea."

"Yes, ma'am, soon's my bread's in."

Lettice was a plain, middle-aged woman of medium height and quite spare. Kindliness was inscribed on her face, and sparkled in her blue eyes. An abundance of flaxen hair was coiled high by a large horn comb. She came to the Wilsons' when 'Lisbeth was a baby, for "two an' thrippence" a week, which slowly increased to "three an' six," and finally she earned the large sum of "five an' six." Though unrelated, she still was one of the family, even to the extent of giving it "a piece of her mind," if necessary, but she never meddled.

Devoted to each one of the household, yet 'Lisbeth, the baby whose dewy breath had been to her parched heart like rain to thirsting blooms, 'Lisbeth, the loving child whom she had kept warm and without fear through bitter nights when winds roared and wailed down the chimney, 'Lisbeth, the beautiful girl whose kindness never failed, was the one love of her life.

An earthen teapot, simmering on live embers between

the andirons, soon sent through its nozzle the tempting odor of green tea.

"What's the news?" asked the farmer.

"Naborin'" was simply an early kind of newspaper; so, while Lettice brought Indian bread, cold meat, a plateful of cookies, — "I hope they're good," she said, "I made 'em outen bonny-clapper cream an' all," — filled the teacups, and passed the sugar, he inquired, —

"What's the news?"

"Well, I don't know, skurcely," she answered; "winter's gone. That is good news."

"The swallows are here," added 'Lisbeth.

"Are they? Yes, Mis' Wilson, I don't care if I do take another cup. This tea is well tasting — very."

"Has Mr. Lane sprouted his seed potatoes yet?" inquired Mr. Wilson.

"No; we're kinder behindhand."

So they conversed of farming awhile, till she raised her cup for a final sip. She set it down, saying, —

"I 'most forgot. Reuben Brown's folks have took Jake Welch till he's twenty-one."

"Bound to 'em?" he asked.

"Yes. Mis' Oliver Brown run down to swap some onion for some beet-seed, — we agreed to, she and I, last fall, — and she told us. They're to give him eight weeks' schooling a year, a suit of boughten clothes and one of homemade, and fifteen dollars when his time's out."

"He's a poor stick — must be," said Mr. Wilson.

"I dunno," Lettice remarked, peering over her "specs." "I dunno. Even firewood ain't all knots, ner red oak. Some ont's cleft maple. I hain't no doubt he's a whifflin', meachin' critter, for he's been kicked an' cuffed an' stomped on 'nuff tew kill; nex' place, he's kinder born so."

"Yes," answered the guest; "as I was saying to Mr. Lane, when we was speaking of it, says I, 'Some are born one way and some another.'"

"I hope Mr. Brown will get his money's wuth," dryly commented Mr. Wilson.

"I guess he will," assented Mrs. Lane; "but see, it's past ten. 'Lisbeth, do bring my bonnet."

'Lisbeth did so, and helped her on with the long black camlet cloak lined with deep red. She wore a dress of unevenly checked black-and-white flannel; and, like the character of its owner and manufacturer, it was warranted to wear and wash; for God made the tint and texture of both. One came from fleeces of black and white sheep, and was woven with her own hands, close by sweet-smelling herbs; the other took shade and substance and wearing-force from spiritual causes. It was fashioned in heavenly looms, and fashionable in heavenly places.

Mr. Wilson and Mrs. Lane were a typical man and woman. They were neighborhood advisers and directors. He was of Puritan descent, she of Londonderry stock, and both descendants of New Hampshire pioneers.

Belknap says, "New Hampshire may be considered the school of stern heroism." The sons of its settlers were a dominant race, born to rule as the sparks to fly upward. They carried sovereignty in their bearing.

Exposure, toil, fatigue, coarse food, and couches of leaves under primeval pines, had developed a breed of men "strong as moose, of commanding presence and even nerve. They had driven out the Indian, felled the forests, and owned the land. They were quiet, genial, neighborly. So, also, they were firm as rocks, flinty in spots, yet possessing oftentimes a rare humor, and peaceful, except on three subjects, — religion, schools, and politics. The granite of their nature always appeared, but delicate mental bluebells hung their swinging cups on many a rough ledge of character. They agreed with the Athenian that "the loss the commonwealth would suffer by lack of education is like that the year would sustain by the destruction of the spring."

"Grand jurors were sworn and charged to present all breaches of law, the want of public schools in particular." Insistence respecting education as the handmaid of liberty created great desire for practical knowledge. Unschooled men learned much from town meetings, raisings, musters, or those more informal gatherings where, sitting on nail-kegs in stores, they absorbed the ideas of their minister, doctor, and squire. The neighbor who took a paper gladly lent it; and the borrower carefully put it "behind the clock" between readings,

and conscientiously returned it. Important speeches of public men were then printed entire, and discussed over hoe-handles at the end of rows, as men rested to take deep draughts of ginger and water in mowing-fields, in shed and kitchen on rainy days, and summer eves as they sat on the dooryard grass. Each neighborhood followed its superior men and women.

Mrs. Lane had kept school, and used the final *g* and *d* of words, said to-morrow instead of "to-morrer," and had so brought up "Loizy" and the boys. Mr. Wilson had ciphered through the arithmetic, read well, and knew New Hampshire history by heart. Their grammar was not above suspicion, but their wisdom led the district.

One institution underlaid all else, — the church of the Pilgrim and Puritan. The last, extremest loyalty of every soul was given to it. Its ministry was educated. Most sermons were controversial. Men of every degree were polemics. Upon the altars of an inflexible creed they made daily offerings of themselves and their families. They believed themselves foreordained to plant that very doctrine by every river and on every hill. Any other sort of men would have failed, and both civilization and Christianity gone with them. They dealt severely with what was termed heterodoxy; but a bent bow must straighten, though the arrow fly amiss.

Let those who rejoice in a loving kingdom of Chris-

tianity lay white lilies above where those chosen and illustrious soldiers sleep, for they were knightly warriors in the armies of the Most High. Those habits of mind would surely lead to examination of a new creed which had appeared at the time of our story. At first it was the far echo of saintly Jesse Lee, then the near call of the apostolic Hedding, followed by circuit-riders preaching in barns, courthouses, fields, or wherever possible. Their sermons defied the regular teaching. "Free grace, free will, full salvation, present witness" were taught with unction. If their code warred against existing dogmas, their manner of service offended, as destroying the prim solemnity of the meeting-house. Above all, they allowed women to "speak in meetin'."

Congregationalism regarded the new sect as unscriptural. It felt the invasion of an enemy, and was sore troubled, not knowing that perchance the Master himself was lopping branches, so that he might graft that sturdy vine with shoots for a diviner fruitage.

In such an unpropitious day, John Mayhew and 'Lisbeth Wilson lived and loved — she, daughter of a man who was straitest of his sect, who clung to all its traditions, faith, and hereditaments; he, son to one who held a tenderer faith, and taught it to his boy. When John was eight years old both parents were dead, since when his aunt, Mrs. Lane, had mothered him. She used half his patrimony for college expenses. He had graduated from Hanover, and was a student

in Squire Baker's law-office at Plymouth, and the squire was Mrs. Wilson's brother.

The excellent manhood of his father, the graciousness of his mother, blent in young Mayhew; yet he was under a cloud to Mr. Wilson, for, though he regularly attended the village church and held no controversy with any, he was baptized a Methodist, and through this complication the little community felt all a-quiver, as on the verge and imminence of social outbreak.

CHAPTER III

MRS. LANE VISITS AT THE KINGS'

MRS. LANE went briskly by the little barn, down the steep hill to its foot, thence some rods along a descending road, and turned sharply to the right through a pair of bars, into a field. The forest crossed the road below the bars, and skirted the field she entered.

She followed a wagon track towards a house not far from the road. It looked homely, handy, and sunshiny, but was a queer clump of carpentry, and Mrs. Lane smiled in a neighborly way at the bunch of boards and windows; an old part squatting one story high on top of a ridge, a new one dropping down its side another story. The old part was covered by matched pine

boards, black, except for patches of lichens, twisted by storms and warped by heat, yet still doing duty very well. It held off resentfully from the new clap-boarded part, which had a door of its own close to the south corner, and a stone rolled into place for a doorstep.

Geese squawked and waddled in a muddy pool where spring water bubbled over from a moss-patched trough a few feet from the threshold. A shed with a long cleft in its side filled with beehives hung to one corner of the house; but the barn had strayed off over the ridge, only its roof being visible.

She had scarcely passed the bars when a brindled dog barked loudly and ran toward her. A woman's figure quickly filled the doorway, and a shrill voice called, —

“Bose, come back here!” but he never looked round.

“Come back, you plaguey dog.”

No. He knew a dog's duty, and was not to be brow-beaten; so he tore along till close to her, when he suddenly stopped, went to one side and examined a weed. Having smelt entirely up and down it, he trotted to Mrs. Lane, perfectly delighted to see her, and looked up cheerily, as saying, “Where in the world were you when I came out to observe that old mullein stalk.”

The woman in the doorway, sixty years old, tall and sinewy, waited to welcome her. One bare arm was lifted, shading her light-blue eyes. Her roundish face was strong, but the nose was delicate, and there were

tender lines across the forehead. A descendant of settlers, she was, like them, industrious, kind, and true. Going to school through deep snows charmed her but little; and when David King, sprung from a race of hunters who loved the woods more than growing crops, and wild life than lowing herds, strayed many times into her father's kitchen, he was more to her than any neighbor's son who could cipher through the "Rule of Three."

Finally he married the comely girl whose family liked his dogs and rods and guns. Therefore Nabby King was waiting her trim visitor, who called,—

"Morning, Mis' King."

"Good land! If 'tain't Mis' Lane! Come in, do. I'm glad you've thawed out. You're goin' tew stop."

"I laid out to, if you ain't busy."

"Busy," said the dame, "I guess not, when we've been jest hankerin' fur tew see somebody outen the house. I want tew neighbor a mite. Take off your things an' set down. Come round the road?"

"Yes."

"Stop at the Wilsons'?"

"Yes, an hour or so, why?"

"Oh, nothin'. Mrs. Harmon was up here yesterday."

"Phil better keep his side of the hedge," remarked Mrs. Lane.

"Why, you've got a new bunnit," said the dame

evasively, turning it round admiringly on one hand and smoothing its soft strings, then added, —

“Here, Marthy, take Mis’ Lane’s things, an’ lay ’em careful in my room.”

“How’s Mr. King?” inquired the visitor.

“Lordy! well, I guess. He’s traipsin’ roun’ somewhere, him an’ the dogs. I wanted a leech tub set up, an’ the ash oven cleared, an’ the taters brought up an’ sprouted, an’ nex’ thing I see he was divin’ intew the woods yender.”

Mrs. King pulled a rocker up to the smouldering fire.

“There now,” said she, beating a bright covered cushion, and throwing it into the chair, “set down and rest ye. You’ve yot your knittin’, and I’ll take mine.”

While speaking she drew her own chair into the opposite corner and sat down.

The room was long, with the dame’s room and pantry at the end. Solid masonry made the wall next the old part, broken by fireplace, oven, and doors leading upstairs, and into Mr. King’s cidery cellar. Above the fireplace, on small spikes driven into mortar between the bricks, hung iron candlesticks, and near them an inch wide strap was looped by nails, a clay pipe depending from each loop. Between the cellar door and bare-studded end the wall was decked with gourds. Some used for drinking-cups were small, and the hue of ripe oranges, with delicately curved handles. Others were large for household service; and some were mended,

being pierced with an awl and threaded with tow string. Two windows looked southerly, and a curious clock tick-tocked in the corner by Mrs. King's room. Above the dial was a dome-shaped arch, central in which a figure of Time, clad in long red tunic over white Turkish trousers, walked barefooted through the snow, his glistening hair streaming out behind as in a February gale.

Bundles of dried herbs and roots hung from the rich red beams overhead, and they were an armory as well. Guns that had descended from sire to son since the palefaces first peered into those warm valleys, guns whose old flint locks struck fire at Bunker Hill, at Valley Forge, at Yorktown, with splintered stocks and bent barrels, reposed on stout brackets beside those still carried on the hardy shoulders of David King.

After opening their work Mrs. King asked, "How's yer man an' Loizy an' the boys?"

"They're well as can be. I hear your wheels humming up-stairs."

"Yes; we're kinder late, an' it's 'most shearin' time agin."

"Speaking of wool," said Mrs. Lane, "makes me think,—I wonder how you're on't for coarse white yarn."

"I dunno; 'pends on how coarse you want."

"Fact is, Mis' King, we've got five skeins of blue left from our frocking. Loizy don't know how it happened, nor I don't, but there 'tis. We spun from good wool,

fine as I practise putting into frocking," said she, passing the yarn. Mrs. King thrust a knitting-needle through her knotted hair, and gravely examined it.

"It's nice yarn, Mis' Lane. You can see what I've got on hand," bringing a bundle from near the window.

"Are you going to make full cloth this year, Mis' King?"

"Dunno as I shall make nothin'," said the dame. "Mis' Field, she borrered my tew and thirty reed an' a harness ever so long ago, an' t'other day she sent for my warpin'-bars. I sha'n't have a thing left tew dew with, time I'm ready tew weave."

"They are curious people," observed Mrs. Lane.

"Curus? I guess so. The old woman's a witch."

"Pshaw!" said Mrs. Lane, "'tain't likely."

Nabby King was superstitious, as were many others round about, and she replied, —

"But, Mis' Lane, you know it, an' her mother afore her; an' jest tew see the childern makes me crawl. They've tumbled offen high beams, an' been run over, an' froze, an' sunstruck. On'y think of it!"

"Nobody takes care of them, Mis' King; their woman-folks spend their time carrying news, and the men are always to the tavern. I wish you had your warping-bars; but as to swapping yarn."

"Good land! I'd forgot. David needs extry feetin' for his moccasins, an' I hain't time tew fuss 'n color. I'm

real glad to swap, so pick out the white, an' I'll slip the blue into its place. I must call them gals. It's high time tew git dinner."

Immediately thê drowsy whir of wheels stopped, and three well-grown, wholesome-looking girls ran smilingly in, each dropping a little courtesy.

"You're busy now school is done," remarked Mrs. Lane.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Pretty good master, so our boys thought; let's see, he boarded here."

Mary, the eldest, grew scarlet.

"He's good 'nuff, nothin' extry," said Martha, which meant that he had been "real partial" to Mary, leaving the younger sisters to plod home alone.

The girls tittered; but Mary hid her vexation after a womanly fashion by taking some sewing from a little table beside the clock, and sitting down to visit with Mrs. Lane. They talked in undertones while Mrs. King gave dinner orders.

"Lucy, come, you rake the coals forrard, an' stir up the backlog, an' put a rock-maple knot on while I'm dressin' our last spe'rib; Martha may throw a Johnny-cake together, an' I'll make some twisted doughnuts tew eat with our new maple m'lasses."

The spit was soon inside the fireplace arch, burdened with its toothsome weight. The upper part of it was a light chain that kept the roast constantly turning.

Martha put the tin oven, like a little two-shelved open cupboard on short legs, before the fire, and Mrs. King went to and fro from pantry to a great iron basin hung on a crane hook, joining in conversation when she could. After a while they spoke of 'Lisbeth's fine needlework.

"She stitched the beautifullest linen bosoms for the minister," said Mary; "never drawed a thread nor nothin', an' the gown she hemstitched for the Square's gal was that pritty I skurcely dast touch it."

"I see them bosoms," came a voice from the pantry, "an' the stichin' couldn't a been no straighter if she'd pulled every thread out."

None noticed the decidedly ambiguous statement as to threads, and the subject changed to flowers and gardens. Mary took down a gourd full of dried blooms and gave Mrs. Lane some marigold and bachelor's button seeds. "I'll sit down while the gals fix the table," said the dame. "I dunno what is goin' tew be done. The gals need new dresses."

Mrs. Lane saw the point at once.

"If you want Loizy a day or so, she can come."

"I should be dretful glad. I'll spin for her."

"Don't say a word," answered Mrs. Lane; "you're welcome. Have you whitened your linen yet?"

"No; I'm waitin' for the apples tew blow."

They talked of maple sugar and swarming bees, while the girls put deep blue plates, dishes of butter, and

cheese upon the table, which was covered with a snowy cloth.

"I wonder where David is," fretted the dame, as she took the spicy roast from the spit. As if replying, there was a scurrying over the ridge, an eager scratching at the door, and a man, followed by two hounds, pushed in.

"Hello, mother; I'm st" —

"Well, David King, you've come, hain't ye? Don't bust in tew compn'y like that."

He was shamefaced a moment at blundering in upon a guest; then with rustic air and quaint smile he shook hands, saying, —

"I vow if 'tain't you. I'm s'prised. How's yer man, an' the boys, an' Loizy?"

"They're well as common, so be you, I guess."

"Not much I ain't. I'm all fagged out fer nothin'; 'sides, I could e'enamost eat an owl, an' I'm dryer'n a piece of last year's moose-meat."

"Been hunting, I guess."

"Yes; but it's soft underfoot, an' there's nothin' roun' 'cept chipmunks an' foxes; no critter wuth shootin' never, no time, any more."

No Puritan blood ran in the King's veins; yet he was as shrewd and valiant as they, a good story-teller, fond of company, never meddlesome, but speaking his mind if any traversed his code of right, humble and reverent in his way. Tradition claimed his ancestry as part patri-

cian, traceable to French seigneurs who had feasted and fought in Canada, from whence his father came; but he cared no more for ancestry than for the husks that littered his last year's cornfield, though underneath the hunter's garb and wildwood air the embers of romantic fire, that had burned quick and high in all his father's race, still glowed.

He kept his hounds, his guns, his powder flasks, his fishing-rods and pickerel spears. He went at will, tracking coons through ripening cornfields, thick grass, or heavy wheat. Where he listed to go with his dogs he went, hence his nickname, the "King," or "King David."

He stood quite six feet high, stooped a little, was large, iron-nerved, showing, in stern lines around his mouth, a force and will belied by merry black eyes and round full face. His complexion was a deep rose shade — the color of red apples had been carried to it through the medium of hard cider, some of it very hard indeed. He showed no more interest in Dame King's delicious dinner than if it had been bread and milk. Pushing back from the table he whistled, and the dogs rushed up.

"Oho!" he said. "Hungry? Want these bones? Then set down." They fell back on their powerful haunches.

David King knew their strain for a hundred years, tracing back to famous French kennels.

Their beautiful heads were nearly as wide at the

muzzle as the crown. Their warm black eyes were soft and meditative; over each was a golden spot no larger than a wren's egg. Their pendent lips, their beautiful ears that drooped to their strong foreshoulders, the shining coats upon their backs, were black as night, but warmed by a tawny color underneath. Their breasts were white, flecked like ermine; and the rest of them yellowish black and white, as were their cordy legs and feet to the long claws.

The King teased them a moment, then threw the bones, saying, —

“Lucy, let 'em out.”

CHAPTER IV

ONE WORD BROUGHT ON ANOTHER

WHEN the door shut behind the dogs, Mr. King pulled up to the fire, and took a couple of pipes down.

“Smoke?” he inquired of Mrs. Lane.

“No, thank'ee.”

He filled the bowls, tipped a coal into each, gave one to his wife, and settled back for a visit.

Mr. King told woodland stories, and inquired about spring ploughing, but all the time seemed uneasy. At last he said, —

“Speakin' of gals an' boys, I'm feared, Mis' Lane,

there'll be trouble up tew Wilson's 'fore it's done. You know why Nabby an' me are worried. 'Tain't no mean streak in us."

"I know." There was a quaver of fear or sorrow in her mellow voice.

"Heerd sunthin' new?" inquired the dame.

"No; didn't need tew, mother. There's John, true an' soun' as bird's-eye maple; next is Wilson's gal; the Lord never made a better one nor pootier."

Mrs. King laid her pipe down, saying, "David, how old be ye?"

"Sixty-one, mother; an' I say I've been into every house 'tween here an' Canady line, but my eyes never lit on no gal like 'Lisbeth."

"I guess not," assented Mrs. Lane.

"There'll be a fuss," Mr. King continued. "John don't ble've in 'lection, so Wilson won't let him marry 'Lisbeth. It's my 'pinion he'll teach the ole man some p'int's about free will."

"Mr. Wilson's a dumb fool," asserted his wife.

"Not by a plaguey sight. I a'most wish he was," commented Mr. King, knocking the ashes from his pipe on the andiron; "he's on'y jest encouragin' Phil Harmon 'cause he sticks tew the doctrines."

"I'm real afraid he favors the Harmon boy," said Mrs. Lane.

"Favors him? I guess so; he's jest naggin' 'Lisbeth 'bout him. If folks followed the laws of the Almighty

with sech a keen scent as they dew the argyments men make up 'bout 'em, they'd tree their game off'ner."

"Why, David!" exclaimed his wife, "that's dretful. You're as wicked as you can be."

"I guess not," said he emphatically; "I b'leve nigh as much as Wilson does, but diff'runt. What's he lecterin' John on the decrees for? I sh'd as soon go pick'ril fishin' with fife and drum. How old is John, Mis' Lane?"

"Twenty-four last November, and our 'Lisbeth's twenty come May."

"That's so. Born May-day; cur'us 'nuff tew. Seems like foreordination an' sich, hanged if it don't."

"Yes," she answered tenderly, "I've thought on't a thousand times; and she's sweet and pretty as May-flowers ever was or ever will be. Makes me think," she went on, "Mr. Wilson was to our house Monday near sundown. We was speaking of old times, clearing farms and so on, finally he spoke, or I did,—I 'most forgit how 'twas, one word brought on another,—of the Mayhews, and then he inquired all about them."

"He's a deep one," said Mr. King, throwing one loose leg over the other, "a deep critter."

"Prying round 'bout John, wasn't he?"

"'Course; but I never heerd the rights on't sca'ceely," said Mr. King.

"You see, 'twas this way." She laid the knitting down and gazed beyond the sodden furrows of last year's

ploughing to the restful forest of dark green pines that belted the far field, laid a forefinger across her lips a moment, — a peculiar custom she had, — and quietly told the story. "His father was morocco dresser, and lived way down to Boston. Thirty years ago next summer, he came up to buy hemlock bark for his father's tan-vats. He come to our house and stayed, and so 'twas the next year. John's exactly like his father in looks and actions; nobody could draw two lines with compasses nearer alike than them two. Lucy was my twin; 'Lisbeth always makes me think of her, somehow. Two years after they was married, when the cherry trees was full of blows, and lived happy as could be, he bringing her home every year.

"When John was eight years old the stage threw off a letter to father's door one day. Mr. Mayhew was sick, and I went right down, and brought them all home. He didn't live; and Lucy died soon after him, being heart-broke, then John was all we had left. His father left money enough for college, and a little more. That's all."

Mr. King paused at the door, after letting the dogs in, before asking, —

"What did Mr. Wilson say?"

"Oh, he said John was a good young man, pity he was a Methodis', an' so on. Then I up and told him there was more of them in Boston than what we've got here, and they seemed to be doing well. I didn't

see how folks could be better than they was; says I, 'a tree is known by its fruit.' I told him plain I didn't lay out to unteach John, — I couldn't anyways, — nor let anybody else do it neither. He went home pretty soon, but I see he was cross."

"It's a wonder," said Mrs. King, "'Lisbeth ain't the forwardest gal in this world with so much schoolin' an' praisin'."

"'Tain't in her tew be forward, Nabby," said Mr. King; "an' her father 'grees tew the schoolin'. When ye wind up a clock it'll go well, and keep at it, an' it's so with the mind. Mr. Wilson has been windin' and windin' 'Lisbeth's mind, or lettin' school teachers dew it, till it goes right along. Why, one day I ast her the name of a book she was readin', an' she said 'twas a history of" — a comical twinkle crept over his face as he pulled a hound's long ear, — "she said 'twas — I'll be darned if it don't sound queer, come tew tell it — a history of Greece."

He drove his hands into his pockets awaiting Mrs. King's stern remark.

"Sounds likely, David, that she spoke sech words as them. If a gal with brothers, big or little, has tew read 'bout that, I'm beat."

Mr. King lounged on to a table corner with the dogs at his heels, grimly remarking, —

"Hang it, mother, she larnt 'bout some fur country anuther."

"'Spect it's the same in fur countries as nigh—where there's boys."

"Well, Nabby, the p'int is, 'Lisbeth's mind bein' wound up, has got tew run."

"For the land's sake, David, let it run; but when it gits tew goin' on spinnin' an' weavin', settin' hens an' pickin' geese, plannin' spring work, an' gettin' ready for winter, she'll be better off."

"Do you mean married to Phil?" asked Mrs. Lane.

"I dunno ner care, somebody."

"Tain't my 'pinion, Nabby," her husband replied, pushing the hounds under the table, and catching up an empty gun and snapping it, "not by a jug-full 'tain't."

"Nor mine," spoke the visitor firmly; "things are diff'runt. Take flax; you can't weave roller towels out of the silky part, and there's only the leastest bit in an acre fit to make ruffles and laid work."

"You're crazy as tew ole loons," asserted dame King. "If she was a boy 'twould seem diff'runt; but there ain't no sense, bein' it's a gal. She'll have tew dew as her father says."

They were silent awhile. That a woman should obey father or husband was accepted law, brought along with the stakes for the first log hut.

"I dunno," said Mr. King at last; "they've been on my mind sence I went huntin' a few days ago."

"The dame eyed him sharply from under her heavy brows, asking,—

"What 'bout foxes? 'twas them animills ye reckoned tew hunt."

"Yes, yes, mother; but a man's li'ble tew scare up what he didn't load fur. Ye see, the dogs and me took an ole trail over the hill back of the barn, and struck the turnpike where the road forks off tew the Plains, dove intew them woods beyend, an' the pups caught a scent. Such a holloo! it went tew my marrer. We trailed roun' clear tew West Plymouth, when the critter came out, an' there 'twas, a hansum ole striped catamount. He was goin' it for all he was wuth, an' the houn's close behine, noses down, an' bodies 'most touchin' the groun'.

"Mighty spikes! ye ort tew seen that run cross Baker's river an' interval. They jest tore the grass-roots outen them medder farms. That ole critter went clear tew Rattlesnake Mounting 'fore we finished him. I whipped his pelt off, an' we come down 'most tew the medder, then we set down on a ledge under some pines an' took our rations. After I'd smoked and watched the river a spell, — funny river Baker's is, querlin' all roun' the medder most, — I slung the hide over my shoulder an' traipsed towards Plymouth, thinkin' to trade it there, an' take Thurlow road home.

"After we got past Meetin'-House Hill, down most tew the common, the 'Cademy shet down for the day, and out tramped the boys an' girls. When we come tew the corner of Russell's store off went the dogs, full cry."

"I'll warrant they see 'Lisbeth," broke in the dame.

"You've hit it, Nabby, 'twas her. I lopped ag'in the store a laughin'. You ort tew seen 'em. The gals was in the store, an' on the door-rock, an' runnin' away screechin' an' 'hollerin'. 'Twas fun now, sartin. But 'Lisbeth want skeert. She jest stood there pattin' the houn's. She was glād to see 'em, she was. Clar for't when she pushed that big bunnit back, — well, 'twas a picture."

The dame tilted slowly back and forth on the hind legs of her chair. She was mortified. He came home that night wearing his oldest hunting-jacket and pouch, and she told him she "did hope he hadn't been out 'mongst folks with them ole duds on," and so failed of the story. She brought her chair forward with a bang and exclaimed: —

"Did you stop there 'mongst that passle of gals an' boys with that critter's skin on yer shoulder? Dirtier'n an Injin tew begin with. Don't name sech a thing to me, David!"

"Yes, mother, I did."

"An' spectin' 'Lisbeth tew speak tew ye? I wouldn't a done it myself."

He answered slowly and proudly, —

"She did. Wilson's gal couldn't a been better mannered tew nobody. No she couldn't, not if I'd been lord of the lan' with a sable coat 'stid of that raw hide. She said I'd been huntin'; where'd I shoot the critter; did I

want tew sell the pelt; an' did I know the storekeeper? I telled her I gener'ly traded tew Bristol, an' nobody knowed me much roun' there. She spoke up hearty an' says, 'Come right in; I knows Mr. Russell; I'll tell him 'bout ye;' an' he give me a good price, 'sides crackers an' cheese."

Mrs. King smiled contentedly. It was useless to fault David, she thought.

"You didn't happen to come 'cross John, I s'pose," queried Mrs. Lane.

"Yes, I did; he looked outen the squire's office winder an' see that picter on the green,—I see him,—I wish we had it nailed up over our fireplace this minit, mother."

"Yes, I wish we had, David," replied the dame, somewhat confused about the propriety of it as she squinted up to the pipes and candlesticks.

"Well, about John," inquired Mrs. Lane.

"As I was sayin', Mis' Lane, 'Lisbeth bought some beads for Dorothy, an' sent some words tew her mother; so, when I got 'em keerful, we come outen the store, an' fust I see was him. He said he'd come a piece with me."

"What for special," inquired she, measuring her footing leg carefully.

Mrs. Lane understood why Mr. King and his wife loved 'Lizbeth, and felt there was a kind of freemasonry between him and John regarding the girl.

He took a gun and powder horn down, and began to fix the priming while he replied, —

“Nothin’ special as I know on. He was sober’n I liked, though he ain’t one of the noisy kind, anyways; but I’ll bet there’s trouble hitched onto Wilson’s tomfoolin’ with doctrines. That’s my ’pinion.”

“John’ll do right, Mr. King, he will.”

“Yes, ma’am, he will; I hain’t a doubt on’t. Mebby Wilson will tew, but I don’t b’lieve it; though if Phil Harmon gits ’Lizabeth, I’ll give up gunnin’.”

Mrs. Lane was evidently troubled; but she only said, as she rolled up her knitting and put it in the basket, “I must go home; our folks looked for me ’fore now.”

“If you must, Marthy’ll bring that root of camomile, which we was speakin’ ’bout ’fore dinner, out of the garden. Girls,” she called, “come right down, Mis’ Lane’s goin’.”

After invitations back and forth, while Mrs. Lane put on bonnet and cloak, the motherly little woman took basket and camomile and went home through the pasture.

CHAPTER V

AT MR. WILSON'S

THERE was no loitering at the Wilsons', for spring work drove them.

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Lane, going before their flocks with salt measures, toled them into a pen by the meadow brook, where the dam of a mill, never built, held the water forming a small pond. Into that the sheep were dragged and washed mid din of boys, shouting of washers, and crying of momentarily bereft lambs. Some days after men clipped their fleeces to the merry click, click of razor-edged shears and rustic songs of the shearing-floor, the master tarred his initials upon their sides, and sent them to the mountain pasture along with young stock. Crops were breaking above warm hills, sage and savory pushed green leaves through the garden mould. Two webs of new linen lay bleaching beneath the apple trees at Mr. Wilson's.

In the kitchen a basket of wool sat under a cool north window, a pair of cards lay upon it, pats of carded wool beside it. Mrs. Wilson was slicing cheese curd, and Lettice brushing the hearth with a turkey's wing, when suddenly Mrs. Wilson inquired, —

“Where's 'Lisbeth?”

"She and Tom was wat'rin' them pink-roots by the front door; an' then I guess she's tyin' up our mornin' glory vines, they're all sprawlin' roun' tryin' tew lay holt on sumthin'. I see her by 'em, an' then Tom come in after thrums."

"Why don't she finish netting these towels?"

"I dunno."

"She must come in. You call her, for her father will expect her to be busy now she's got home."

"Yes, ma'am. I see she's been runnin' roun' all this mornin'. She's dretful quiet like, though."

"Kinder tired of school," said her mother.

"Cat's foot! 'tain't that."

"What is it, Lettice? She looks well."

"She ain't in consumption, Mis' Wilson, nor sick anyways."

"Call her; she must set down to work."

"S'posen she can't keep still, Mis' Wilson?"

"What's to hender?"

"Good land! she'd like tew set right down by that winder, smellin' the apple blows; love tew dearly, but she can't, in my opinion."

"Well, I never!"

"It's her mind that can't. 'Tain't likely what we see an' call 'Lisbeth can set stock still with that, runnin' nigh and yender. If I was you, I'd send her an' the boys up the Pinnacle for broom stuff."

"Do you need a broom?" inquired Mrs. Wilson doubtfully.

"Yes, I do. This ole one ain't skurcely fit tew sweep the oven out with, let alone floors that's been fresh washed."

A low hymn preluded 'Lisbeth's entrance.

"Where's the children?" inquired her mother.

"They went hunting eggs."

"Lettice, call them, if you want a broom."

"'Lisbeth's goin' tew," remarked the maid. "An' you'll have tew climb the Pinnacle, for hemlock from up there lasts as long ag'in as the medder stuff."

"You don't want to go, it's so warm, do you, 'Lisbeth?" queried Mrs. Wilson.

"Yes, mother; yes, indeed I do."

"Then be very spry, for Lettice is in a hurry."

"They needn't hurry a mite," said the maid. "My work ain't done up, an' the milk emptin's is riz, there's pepper tew pound for the pepper-box, it's dryin' afore the fire now, — much as I can dew 'fore dinner. Here's the children," said she, as they came up to the window through mustard leaves.

"See, 'Lisbeth," one called, holding up a hat full of eggs, "we've got a nest under the bay sill, one in the sheep rack, one in the dock leaves, an' we've just found another in the tansy close up to the wall."

"Good. Put them away and come, Lettice wants a broom."

"You going, oh, what fun! Drop that kitten, Dorothy. Come along, Tom. Lettice, give us a doughnut."

"Doughnuts!" cried she, going as fast as she could to an earthen jar full; "I wonder what boys are made of. They're always hungry 'less they're sick abed."

'Lisbeth was a goodly sight, with her blue sun-bonnet dangling from an arm, her blue linen dress cut according to the Puritan order that "Their sleeves shall come to the wrist, and their gowns be closed about the neck."

The boys and Dorothy went before and on all sides. They showed her where robins and blackbirds builded; carefully opened grasses by a rock heap, letting her peep into a ground-bird's nest; they found checkerberry knolls, and examined woodchucks' burrows.

Care, fallen from them, remained at home with the handmaid and matron. Lettice was fairly up in arms; so, finally, she turned upon Mrs. Wilson not fiercely, but determinedly, as one seeks truth without apology.

"Mrs. Wilson, what is it?"

"Why, Lettice, you're sharper'n an' axe, this morning! What is what?"

"That's the pint. I'm after light on't."

"Light on it! I don't see anything wrong."

"Folks don't gener'ly see what they keep behind 'em."

"Lettice!"

"'Tain't no use makin' b'lieve twixt you an' me. I'm goin' tew know one thing; an' if you deal double in your words, I'll find somebody that won't, so there!"

"Why!"

"We're past whyin'. It's full as hard for me tew ask as 'tis for you tew answer. Tell me' what Phil Harmon's struttin' roun' here for, prompt an' high-headed as ever I see or ever want tew? A body feels like chasin' him down the hill with a mortar pestle. I'd ruther see folks a little less forthputtin'. What's his errant?"

"He hasn't made any to me," replied Mrs. Wilson rather dejectedly. Lettice stood by the dresser with an armful of plates. She gave Mrs. Wilson a queer stare before saying, —

"No, ma'am. Then most probable he hain't spoke tew nobody, an' you don't 'spect he has. P'raps he dresses himself with a starched bosom, an' comes up tew show the boys how tew sling stones at yellor birds, but it don't look likely."

"He is a good, capable young man, Lettice, and clear on the doctrines, that is past denying."

"Yes," said Lettice dryly; "I persoom he'll stick tew them as gives him the whip hand. Set right still, I'll put this curd intew the cheese-hoop."

"I kinder thought we'd put tansy in it, Lettice."

"I would, Mrs. Wilson, if I was you. Let me run out for it."

As she broke the full-flavored herb, far-off laughter from the children high up on the Pinnacle, as a precipitous hill to the right was called, came to her. Her face grew stern and set. She began talking when she reached the entry.

"As I was sayin', Phil may be good, but he's awful selfish, an' gaps don't look well in a man's conscience more'n they dew in a wall or rail fence. Don't take long for critters tew get in, 'little foxes that spile the vines' an' sech. I 'spose he can rattle off 'Honor thy father an' thy mother;' but his practice ain't wuth a cent."

"Not a good son?"

"No, ma'am; he ain't, as I look at it. He'd hate tew see his folks hungry, or have 'em wear ragged clothes, an' would send for the doctor if they was sick; he 'pears well 'fore comp'ny an' all that, but when they're alone it's diff'runt."

"Why, Lettice Bean!"

"Yes, ma'am; good tew the neighbors an' allus was; but there's his mother, pretty as a pink blow ever was or ever will be, he's cross an' sullen tew her half the time. Abigail Sweet, that lived there a year when the ole lady was sick, told me how 'twas, an' I hain't a doubt on't."

"I never heard him faulted so, Lettice."

"He ain't faulty entirely, for he's been brought up tew think the sun riz an' set by his motions. If he gits the right wife, with temper an' sense tew train him, he'll be a fust-rate man; but it'll take a gal diff'runt from our 'Lizbeth. That stent ain't set for her; an' if she tries it, mark my words, Mis' Wilson, she'll be dead or wuss less'n a year."

Lettice put the cheese into the press and began carding, leaving Mrs. Wilson to think a moment. Finishing the first roll she began again, —

“Do you think Phil cares a cent for 'Lisbeth?”

“Why, certainly, Lettice.”

“I don't b'lieve it, not reely. He wants tew marry her 'cause all the rest of the boys dew tew, — show how smart he is. I've allus thought, and think still, he'd pick Eunice Batchelder out of ten thousand gals if 'twan't for that. But there's a side tew this business where he don't come in. 'Lisbeth went tew the 'Cademy last year, you know.”

“And the year before too.”

“Humph! Mis' Wilson; fust year John Mayhew was tew college, an' last he was studyin' law with your brother. You'll see 'twas quite a change 'fore you're through. Them tew have sot by one 'nuther sence they was the leastest mites on the a-b-c seat.”

The mother drew a weary breath, saying, “Mr. Wilson never will hear one word to such a thing, never.”

“P'r'aps not; but he'll hear a toll'ble sight about it, I can tell you.”

“I'm sure he has given encouragement in another direction, Lettice.”

“Zactly. Now, who's 'Lisbeth goin' to incurridge.”

“'Lisbeth!”

“Yes, ma'am, 'Lisbeth.”

“Why, I never thought” —

"Of her? Oh, no; but I have. Are you an' her father layin' out tew make her marry Phil?"

"Make! I don't like that word, Lettice."

"Don't matter whether the question comes back or aidge. Are you plannin' on it?"

"Her father wants her to."

"What did you say?"

"Say! say to him! He is head of the house."

"An' pritty much all the rest on't, 'pears tew me," replied Lettice.

"Lettice, you must not. Such talk is against all lights and doctrine."

"I've follered both pritty close, that you know; but if they lead tew what you're plannin', them lights 'll seem poorer tew me than a one-wick't taller candle, an' the doctrines wuss."

Mrs. Wilson gazed terrified at the usually quiet, helpful spinster, so exemplary in every respect, so suddenly transformed into an independent woman, flying in the face of order, duty, and religion. She answered meekly, —

"Mr. Wilson is head of this house by divine authority, an' he will do right, Lettice, he will."

"Mebby he will, an mebbly he won't."

"Why, Lettice! why-ee-e-e!"

"I don't want tew fault him, but I am skeered of this whole business. I tell you, our 'Lisbeth never 'll put her mind on the Harmon boy. She won't — can't," said Lettice fiercely.

The relation of mental to muscular force was illy comprehended by Mrs. Wilson; but she felt very insignificant as her heretofore meek help strode to the fireplace, lifted a large iron kettle full of water and hung it on the crane, — a man's work.

“What is goin' on here?”

The two women saw grandmother's soldierly figure and dominant cap-border framed in the east-room door. Lettice made haste to say, —

“The iron kittle was bilin' over on the coals, if that's what you heard.”

“Where's 'Lisbeth?” demanded the old lady, marching to a chair by one window.

“Gone with the children after broom stuff,” answered Lettice quickly, trying to gain a little time for Mrs. Wilson, who was trembling at the signs of a severe overhauling. Laughter trilling through the orchard notified the old lady that her time was short.

“Cur'us way tew bring up a gal; it wa'n't so in my day. Hemlock! there she is up by the orchard bars, with her hands full of young brakes or some sech stuff. Why ain't she cardin', Marthy? Toilin' an' spinnin' is her portion, so prepare her for it.”

Lettice dropped some baking-tins, that rattled over the floor. She quickly picked them up, and went into the pantry humming, which habit of hers was a fret to the old lady, who chewed a piece of sweet-flag while Lettice disappeared and shut the door.

Dame Wilson then began again, —

“She will merry the Harmon boy, for Thomas has ’greed tew it; an’ she needs tew know sunthin’ ’sides laid work or knottin’ ribbins. Them Harmon women are workers fust an’ last.”

“Her father has spoke about it,” meekly replied Mrs. Wilson.

“Then ’tend tew it,” was the stern command as the children entered.

’Lisbeth recognized a stormy atmosphere, and quietly sat down by a window near her mother, whose hands were combing a white fleece. As Lettice trimmed the hemlock and tied it to the broomstick, she noticed the girl’s steady eyes looked questioningly out on green field and budding clover, and half a sigh mingled with the soft wind that wafted the odor of ten thousand times ten thousand incense cups from the blossoming trees.

Years after Lettice said, “I never made no claim tew second-sight; but I seed it all one mornin’, the day after she come home from the ’Cademy, an’ John studyin’ law in the squire’s office same time. She was nettin’ a towel by the north winder, ’long of her mother an’ the rest of us, her eyes an’ hair a-shinin’, an’ the trees full of blows.”

CHAPTER VI

SOME DOMESTIC MATTERS

WHAT she said that morning very sharply, as she jerked the new broom into a corner, was, —

“If you plan tew quilt 'fore hayin', we must think about it, for the quiltin'-frames need new flannel round 'em, an' the wool ain't carded.”

“I lay out to quilt one, certain.”

“More'n one?”

“No, unless 'Lisbeth wants hers done.”

“I?” the girl said. The suggestion awakened a misty sense of something disagreeable that was better antagonized at once. The granite of her nature appeared in the firm reply, —

“I don't want it finished.” Then she continued, cheery as ever, “But you better let me bring a basket of wool coarser than this and card for yours.”

A dismayed feeling overcame Mrs. Wilson, and an ominous “Humph” from the grandmother alarmed her, as 'Lisbeth started up-stairs. She returned immediately, followed by footsteps in the entry. A hearty smile beamed from Mrs. Lane's calash as she said, —

“Morning, Mis' Wilson; morning, grandma'am and all. Guess you wern't looking for me so soon.”

"We are as glad to see you as can be," replied Mrs. Wilson. "Come to a chair and lay off your bonnet."

"I'll push it back while I set a minit. I've come borrowing, Mis' Wilson."

"Why, certain, anything we've got."

"I want 'Lisbeth. You see, Loizy and I want to quilt. We colored the lining last fall with good strong maple dye set with alum, — makes a nice dark shade, so I told Loizy we'd quilt it next week Wednesday, if 'Lisbeth could help us, she has such a knack for sewing linings into frames and laying on wool pats."

Mrs. Wilson was perplexed. To hesitate was ill-mannered; but she feared young Mayhew was at home, and mistrusted her husband would object to 'Lisbeth's passing a day in the same house with him.

Lettice understood the situation. She knew Mrs. Wilson was deciding whether she should risk blame from a man she feared, or fail a neighbor. It was a hard case. The growing fret puzzled Mrs. Lane, and she hastened to relieve it.

"Law, now, Mis' Wilson, don't trouble yourself a mite. Like enough we can git Ruth."

"Of course she can go, Marthy," broke in the grandmother; "why don't you tell Mis' Lane so? I s'pose you're folks are all tew home an' well."

"All well, I guess: two of our boys have gone to their Uncle Daniel's; he's kinder behindhand with his

work, and Mr. Lane told John he better stick to law a few days longer."

Mrs. Wilson's change of expression was so sudden and absolute that a demure twinkle danced out from her visitor's calash, as she said, —

"'Lisbeth can go as well as not, Mis' Lane, and be glad to. You don't think of anything to hender, do you, Lettice?"

"No, I don't," answered she, as she went softly humming to the cellarway.

Mr. Wilson came in cloudy and stern.

"Good-mornin', Mis' Lane, how be ye?" he inquired grumpily.

"I'm well. Seems to me you ain't quite so chipper as common."

"I ain't. I'm sicker'n a dog."

Mrs. Wilson rose doubtfully, but his mother rushed to the dresser.

"Hand down that bottle of rum and thoroughwort, Lettice. It is his liver, I know."

"Put up that bottle," said he sharply.

"Take a spoonful, jest one," pleaded his mother.

"Put it up an' set down. I ain't sick. It is sunthin' wuss'n liver complaint, or fever either. 'Tain't nothin' you can shoot, but it's meaner'n skunks."

"What is it?" demanded his mother.

"A man," — they held their breaths, — "a good-for-nothin' circuit rider comin' right among us."

"Not exactly, Thomas; you're sole Prudential Committee in this deestrick." She stood straight and defiant like her son.

"I am," he said, "an' no heresy will be ranted round here."

"What's his name? who is he?" they inquired.

"Benson, Joseph Benson. Comes from Boston way, so I hear. One of the most dangerous of the lot, nigh as I can make out."

"I've heard of him," said Mrs. Lane. "Charity Brown, she 'twas Charity Smith, told me she heard him down below. His singing is beautiful, she says, tenor voice, and his appearance is powerful as well as his preaching."

"Yes," said Lettice, putting a fresh stick on the fire; "there ain't nothin' feeble about 'em, that is one fact. Them Methodis' fellers gener'ly go at it hammer an' tongs."

"What!" Mr. Wilson looked so fierce she caught hold of the mantel-tree. "Are you tarred with that stick, Lettice Bean?"

Her spirit equalled his as he very soon learned.

"Nobody but the A'mighty has a mark on me, an' that I'll let ye know, Thomas Wilson. As fer doctrines, I've stuck tew 'em, an' 'spect tew; but I can't help thinkin' the new ones would make us all full as comf'table."

"Never let me hear another word of that kind while

you stay in this house, Lettice. What are your opinions, Mis' Lane ? ”

“ We are told to prove all things, and hold fast the good. We haven't proved this, have we ? ”

“ I am surprised at such talk from you an' Lettice. Are you upholdin' these errors, Mis' Lane ? Certain you talk like it.”

“ You would uphold anything wrong quick as I would, Mr. Wilson ; but neither of us can pull weeds afore they grow. In a corn-hill our folks gener'ly let corn-sprouts and weeds come along together high enough to tell them apart, and then weed out.”

His scowl darkened as he said, “ I'm afraid you're tamperin' with the souls of them boys of yourn, keepin' John Mayhew, an' so harborin' sech ungodly doctrines.”

She smiled firmly but soothingly while replying, —

“ The boys won't learn bad principles or practices from him, that I know.”

“ Makes out what I was a-sayin', ” went on the farmer. “ Doctrines are bein' let go of — everything tew loose ends. John seems good, but it's a deceivin' thing born in him, wuss for him than anybody ; 'tain't real religion, 'cause he hain't got none.”

“ Law, now, Mr. Wilson,” said she gently, “ you're clear mistook about John. Our folks never see a sign of his thinking himself good ; no, I guess not. But our old house seems kinder dark when he goes away, an' none of us ever heard an unbecomin' word from him in

this world. He ain't a 'sissy boy,' either. He sticks to what he sets out for. There's no let go to John, if he don't talk so smart."

Her remarks nettled him more. Persistency was a quality he preferred the young man should lack. He threw a domineering glance towards 'Lisbeth bending over her work, saying, "Children are gittin' out of control, settin' up for themselves. It is entirely wrong, an' I hold tew the old ways of family authority. Nobody will gainsay the decrees in words or actions in this house while I live an' stay in it."

"Where is this minister going to preach?" inquired she, hoping to turn the subject.

"Minister! he ain't one, he's nothin' at all, wuss'n nothin'; but sech as he is he's coming tew the Hill school house."

"There, Mr. Wilson, I wouldn't borrow trouble, not a mite. Our folks come here to find a spot where they could think as they'd a mind to; and it don't look well in us, 'pears to me, to be browbeating the first ones that disagree with us."

"Don't you believe in our church?" he asked severely, feeling sure that she entertained heterodox views as to the obedience of wives, at least. He knew she and Mr. Lane reasoned together, but doubted if her husband had ever really laid a command upon her. She touched a finger to her lip, looked thoughtfully through the apple blossoms a moment, then answered, —

"Yes, I do believe pretty much as I was taught, but I put the Bible above the Catechism."

"Don't you s'pose the learned doctors that made the Catechism understood all mysteries an' knowledge?"

"Skurcely, but law, that's nothing against them. No man can see it all. Do you, or I, or anybody?"

Mr. Wilson was terrified, really so. He obeyed the law, he adored it; and Mrs. Wilson judged it by ordinary mental processes. It was dreadful in his eyes.

"Mis' Wilson!" he exclaimed, "how dare you? Them men was given to know what is too hard for us, let into great mysteries an' all of 'em. You must persoom so."

"Mostly, I lay out you are right, Mr. Wilson; but I read, 'His ways are past finding out.' So far as Latin and so on goes I've no fault to find; but when they undertake to explain what God thinks, and his ways, I don't see as it would make much difference who was laying hold on what nobody could find out, you, or I, or them. I guess if I should say to our quilting, Loizy and I are going to have, that I knew the Lord's plans, and how He is meaning to carry them plans out, there'd be some cur'us looks across them quilting-frames."

Mr. Wilson rose, white and resolute. "I've dreaded it," he said, "an' I do still, Mis' Lane; seems, as if the very foundations was movin', but then they ain't. They are sure, havin' the seal. Trouble is threat'nin', a sight of it, but the elect shall possess the earth," and he

strode out with the mighty air of one who fights for the Cross on any field.

"Pity I said a word. It's too bad I did, Mr. Wilson is so stirred up," said Mrs. Lane.

"We better not s'arch," said the old lady imperatively; "we better set right down an' set there. My folks, nor gran'sir Wilson's, never dreamt of sech works, never."

The steady voice of another warrior came from the pantry.

"Sayin' we must'nt s'arch intew the new doctrine ain't sense. We shall have tew, so will Thomas Wilson, an' we better go at it sorter reasonable like."

"O dear, I hope it won't be so bad a time," said Mrs. Wilson.

"We sha'n't want it any wuss, I'll warrant," Lettice replied, adding, "'Lisbeth, won't you run intew the garden, an' nip off a mite of green sage for this stew, an' mebbe you tew women better finish up as tew quiltin'."

"The main thing was 'Lisbeth; an' you thought she could come, so I understood, Mis' Wilson," said the visitor as she rose to go.

"Yes, I'm glad she came home in season to help you."

Mrs. Lane pulled her calash on, and reached the outer door where she paused, turned back, and said, —

"Seeing you're cabbige plants in them boxes makes me think that Mr. Lane told me to be sure and ask if

you can spare some. Our seed never come up, not a seed."

"Why, yes, certain," answered Mrs. Wilson, going back with her visitor; "and don't you want some house-leeks? this banking is full of them. Take all you want; they grow better for weeding out. Here is a little bail basket of Dorothy's on the chips; you can take them home in it."

"Loizy'll be glad of them. The snow was so thin, most everything died under our fore-room window but the sweet pinks and southernwood. When are you going to put in your camlet quilt?"

"Some time 'tween now and haying."

"I would. I'm much obliged for the roots and cabiges, and Loizy'll be glad to help any time. I guess she may run down with the basket towards sunset."

"We're always pleased to see her, but don't put yourselves out about the basket."

CHAPTER VII

MRS. LANE'S LITTLE BROWN HOUSE

DAY was young when 'Lisbeth went out into its splendor on the morning of quilting-day. No clouds threatened, only a few fleecy pennons unfurled above the northern hills.

Underfoot smartweed showed its rosy specks of bloom, and pale blue innocence jostled against patches of chickweed, whose white atom flowers played hide and seek among its yellowish leaves.

Little knolls by the wayside were pricked out by hair-like stems and fragile heads of robin-wheat.

Buttercups lifted their golden chalices to the golden sun, and swung with graceful nodding on their slender stems. White and red clover emptied censers on the lightly moving breeze; white and red roses, tangled in walls, exhaled perfume.

Deep in each rose heart, pendent to flower and weed, hung to green blades, sparkled tiny jewels, shading through all the prismatic tones. From grass-spire, bush, and tree chorussed choirs of birds. She loved even the homeliest life about her.

She felt a faithful devotion to lake and sentinel mountain, to rugged steeps with moss-patched boulders bedded into their sides; she loved the network of brown roots in gravelly banks. Trees, flowers, and birds, all were hers, the full, undeeded riches of a wholesome life. Travelling unbonneted up the northern road, every movement replete with the free grace of the hills, suddenly she paused by the orchard bars, and inhaled a slow breath. A look of delight came over her as if she felt all beauteous things waited upon her that perfect day.

She pulled her ealash on, and hurried to "the half-way mark," which was a grove of yellow birches mid-

way between her father's house and Mrs. Lane's. In an open central space among them, a gnarled trunk had bent while growing, forming a seat, above and around which a tall sweetbrier grew.

The spice of its swelling buds had beckoned 'Lisbeth at the bars; and she hastened into the nook, caught a low limb, and swung to the seat. She pulled the brier twigs down, and plucked some flowers for her bodice and some for Mrs. Lane, then went into the road and over a sounding ledge that echoed each footfall like the beat of a far drum.

There the weather-beaten Lane homestead was in sight, sheltered northerly by the fertile slopes of Kidder Hill. It nestled close to the long western face of the Pinnacle. On that stony height cows and a cosset lamb were feeding. A huge rock seemed carefully driven part of the way into its side, and standing upon it a black-and-white cow unconcernedly cropped her breakfast from around it. One was persuaded that only a giant mullein-stalk, rooted at the boulder's foot and bracing hard against it, prevented rock, cow, and all from tumbling into the road and dooryard.

The Pond, with verdant field and hill, lay westward, and Smith Hill cinctured the southern horizon like a green zone.

Mrs. Lane's house was one story high, with eaves to the road. Its dovetailed boards were warped and black, and spotted with tree-moss. A door and two windows,

one high up, broke the gable end ; two windows opened on the road.

At the house corner, by the door, an immense post rose higher than the eaves, upholding a well-sweep which seesawed on it, as a dangling pole carried a bucket down into the well and back.

The yard was full of mallows and short-stemmed clovers, over which fluffy little chickens tripped themselves in their first efforts for a living.

Mrs. Lane stood at a bench by the well-curb, patting butter into golden bricks, as the girl came up.

"Morning, 'Lisbeth, brier roses ?"

"Good-morning, Mrs. Lane. Yes ; I picked them and some brakes coming along."

"I'm real glad you did, for our garden blows are skurce yet. Loizy," she called, "give 'Lisbeth that cracked pitcher off the dresser."

Louisa was a bright little woman with black hair, black eyes, and round rosy face like her father. She made a mock courtesy to the young girl, saying, "You can reach the dish for that pretty posy as you come out of mother's room, when you've hung your bonnet up."

'Lisbeth went through into Mrs. Lane's room. Part of a great chimney filled one corner, and numerous shelves were nailed to it. High, brass-handled chests and drawers hid the unplastered walls. Live-geese feathers gave a lightsome fluffiness to the high bed,

where a linen sheet was smoothly turned over a white and indigo coverlet, woven fox-and-geese pattern.

Returning, she filled the pitcher on the high window-sill, the lower sash being thrown up and held by a wooden button.

The kitchen was wainscotted to the beams. Two unbanded linen wheels with full distaffs waited under the north windows.

When 'Lisbeth was carrying the nosegay to the fore-room Mrs. Lane called, "You may slice this curd 'fore you sew in the lining, 'Lisbeth."

A wooden tub sat in the entry; and across it were four thin slats, mortised together, each two crossing the other at right angles, the whole named "cheese-tongs." Upon them sat a square, shallow cheese-basket, lined with a sheer strainer that held the amber curd. She took a thin, sharp knife, and drew it gently through the soft mass, time after time, streams of whey following each delicately drawn seam, until the curd was in blocks half an inch square. When it was properly finished, she asked,—

"Where is the caraway seed, Mrs. Lane? Louisa wants me to pick over some."

"In that cupboard behind you, right side, in that broken teapot. Set right down on the doorstep where it is cool, and pin up them spandy clean sleeves out of the dust."

At that moment Phil Harmon came round the house,

sauntering up to the curb with a free-and-easy air, and regarding the scene quite approvingly, as he said "morn-in'," to no one in particular. Once for all, he really did not love 'Lisbeth, but her distant kindness piqued him.

What right had she to hold herself aloof from him, who owned flocks and herds. He had asked Mr. Wilson's consent to marry her because he coveted the loveliness that ranked itself so far away. He would like to see those beautiful hands milking his cows. Affairs would have been different had Mr. Wilson comprehended the real situation; but he believed that fatal heresy that a woman once married would be content, and trusted Philip, who was himself half-blinded by his pride.

Mr. Wilson was a bigot, unmeaningly and unknowingly; he simply strove to save his child to his own church, and to such meagre chance of heaven as election afforded.

Two such men combined against the peace of one girl put her in sorrowful plight.

Curious though it was, yet as he gazed Philip feared that troubled, downcast maiden. Had she risen and stretched one hand towards him he would have started off down the lower field, regardless of flower-beds or hills of early potatoes. He chose no speech with her, but asked Mrs. Lane, —

"Where's your man?"

"Down in the cornfield, hoeing."

"Where's John?"

"Spying on me," thought the girl, and she was exactly correct.

"To Squire Baker's office, where he's been going on two years, fur's I know," answered Mrs. Lane.

"I'll find Mr. Lane." She would have inquired if his mother was coming that afternoon; but the King's hounds bounded under the well-sweep and up to a stone bowl full of water beside the curb, followed closely by their master, who grounded arms, leaned against a door-post, and pulled his slouch hat off, exclaiming, —

"Phew! we've had a run, the dogs an' me."

Mrs. Lane smiled peculiarly, asking, —

"Why, Mr. King, you are out hunting again. What in the world is becoming of your corn?"

"Corn's dewin' well. Crop'll be 'round this fall all right. 'Praps not so many ears, ner so big as your'n, but there's allus 'nuff. Fact is, Mis' Lane, I reckon the Lord 'lects tew tend tew ole fools like me, an' I 'spect He will. I've been linin' a bee this mornin', an' I took my gun along fer kingbirds. Ye see, they're worryin' our hives, an' bees need as much 'tention as corn or 'taters. Let a kingbird find a bee out on a clover-head, wet with dew, why, the little 'tarnal 'll set right down on a herd's grass stalk nigh tew it, an' swing, an' throw up his head, a-singin' till all creation seems chock full on't, then, whist! he jumps like a flash an' there's a bee less every time."

"Did Phil go out with you this morning?"

"Phil! he?" pointing to a head disappearing down the sloping field. "That is the curiourest idee I ever laid hold on. He couldn't line a woodchuck if it burrered thirty rod off."

Both women laughed, and Mrs. Lane said, —

"If you are done picking over them seeds, won't you give Mr. King a nutcake, an' a piece of ole cheese. Coffee-pot is by the fire, 'Lisbeth."

"Sit here by this cool window," 'Lisbeth said, as they entered the kitchen. "Did you find the wild swarm you were tracking?"

His eyes kindled. "That's just like a gal, — trackin' a bee! Dy'e think he leaves footprints in posies?"

"Line a bee, is it? One seems as sensible as the other to me."

"No, little gal; ye see, when a bee is loaded with honey, an' starts for home, it flies straight as sight. If ye want to find whatsoever it lives in, take a pot of honey an' set it down in the woods an' watch. Soon a bee comes, takes what he can carry, an' flies home true as any line. Foller him tew a tree or rock with your eye, fur as you can see; then pick up the honey an' set it down again by what you sighted. It'll come back, an' bime-by you'll lead up tew what you're lookin' for."

The King had been pondering upon Phil's doggedly wilful appearance as he came under the well-sweep.

He slowly smoothed his shiny head as he thought it over.

Phil was usually busy such days, when hoeing was driven by haying. He queried over it while eating his nutcakes, and finally decided to find out one thing certain, proceeding immediately in his way.

"Them's plaguey good fried cakes, 'Lisbeth. Helpin' Loizy with her quilting, be ye? I wonder if that was Phil's errant tew?"

She replied absently, —

"No, I don't s'pose it was."

"Nor I nuther. Look a-here, do you like tew have him roun'? Is he makin' trouble anyways?"

She was silent, and he continued soon, —

"David King don't meddle ner make; but he 'members the blessing you brought tew his house, an' he can't see sorrer comin' tew you that he can hender."

Still she was dumb.

"Gal, you know David King can be trusted, an' if you call he'll hello back every time. I'm feared of sunthin'. S'posen Phil Harmon sh'd ask you tew merry him?"

She gazed at him, gray and flinty, replying with unquivering voice, —

"He never will dare, Uncle David;" then slowly, "I should hate him."

"Then don't let nothin' ner nobody drive you tew it. I'd rather see you dead, fer I sh'd know you wan't

twenty years dyin', and you'd be in God's worl' somewhere, though I don't rightly see what would become of the rest of us."

The girl's thankful look rewarded that faithful soul. Hearing a step in the entry, he called out, —

"Fust-rate fried cakes an' coffee, Miss Lane. I'll 'member 'em when I take up the swarm. Come 'long, pups, 'less mother won't roast no p'taters for us."

Louisa appeared with some quilting-frames, brought from the loom shed.

"There," she said, "I've got all, I guess. Frames — they need the flannel round 'em fastened in a few places — lining, and wool. I laid some thrums on a chair in the other room."

Somehow, as 'Lisbeth sewed the lining in, and spread the wool pats, she was happy. Reliance on a powerful ally made the outlook quite hopeful; so she sang at her work, while Louisa finished the tart covers, and Mrs. Lane emptied the creamy white curd into the cheese-hoop, and put it into the press.

"I guess we will have our dinner a little early," said she to Louisa, coming in, bringing a large noggin of potatoes, and burying them in red-hot embers between the andirons.

Opening the fore-room door, 'Lisbeth called, "Now, if you both will help me, our quilt will soon be ready."

The quilting-frames, fastened securely together by gimlets, one at each corner, lay upon the floor, with the

lining sewed in and wool-pats laid upon it, ready for the patchwork. They raised the frames to four kitchen chairs, one under each gimlet, thus supporting the work conveniently for the quilters. They spread the patchwork on so deftly that no pat was misplaced, and pinned it evenly all around the edge, and it was ready. 'Lizbeth cut a fine white skein of linen and one of blue into small hanks, braided, to prevent snarling, and laid them, along with some boughten red thread, needle-books, wax, and shears upon it; then she moved the flowers to the top of a low, spindle-legged bureau. Mrs. Lane wiped the gilt-framed looking-glass, and pushed Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" and Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" farther on the claw-footed table, with mosaic of fine woods round its bevelled edge.

After a final survey of the room they left the disconsolate mourning woman, pictured above the fireplace, to watch for merry matrons and maids who should surround the quilt.

CHAPTER VIII

QUILTING

By one o'clock they began arriving. Mrs. King, Mary, and Mrs. Harmon walked up through pasture and field, meeting the Kidder women from the hill in the dooryard, and waited for Mrs. Wilson and Lettice, who

were across the ledge; and just behind them Mrs. Willard and her daughter Ruth, with Mrs. Batchelder, walked beside Mrs. Batchelder's saddle, or strayed back a little to Mrs. Smith's boat-shaped wagon, bringing herself and Lavina.

Such a chatter as there was, such a mild and self-composed to-do as they came in and put on their caps.

"Take some chairs," said Mrs. Lane. Here, Mis' Kidder, you look warm, take this peacock fan; and Mis' King, here's this gray goose one. Aunt Seth looks as cool as a cucumber."

Mrs. Batchelder (Aunt Seth) wore stiff, double-plaited cap frills, which emphasized her incisive speech. They all felt much respect for that black-haired, reliant person, and blue-eyed Uncle Seth adored her in his silent fashion.

"How be you goin' tew quilt this?" inquired one.

"Loizy and I don't skureely know. Some of you help us out."

They surrounded it, and one advised herring-bone, one cat-a-cornered work, and so on. Finally Mrs. Lane said, "Lettice, you plan it."

She studied the quilt, and gave an opinion.

"If this was mine, Mis' Lane, I sh'd put in a pine-tree pattern intew these large blue squares, with brick-red corners set in sasser fashion, an' quilt the corners 'cordin' tew their shape. As tew the other squares of small patchwork, bias is as good as any way, nothin' 'll show."

She and Louisa marked prescribed lines and curves as far as they could reach; the women passed their snuffboxes, and then drew around the quilt. Several were left out of work.

"Fact is," observed Aunt Seth, "I brought some linen; nothin' tew dew but our Dan must have a stitched bosom, so I thought if we couldn't all git round the quiltin'-frames mebbby 'Lisbeth would full as soon stitch."

"Certainly," replied she. "Shall I trace some leaves on the edge?"

"Not a leaf. As I tell Seth, childern larn struts and furbelows soon 'nuff. I want jest a plain back-stitch."

Fine needlework was considered an accomplishment, therefore the request was a compliment in that unique social world, where living was co-operative in an excellent sense.

"Let every one of you be mindful of the things of another," was honored as a strict command which hushed every family if one suffered; which brought women home at dawn pale with vigils beside a sufferer's couch. Everything except speech was free to a needy soul or body. The joy, sorrow, success, and failure of each was the common possession of all.

"Ruth may take this sleeve and sew in the gusset and fell the seams, and I'll give the rest some harnesses to mend," said Mrs. Lane.

The door darkened, yes, darkened ; that word is used advisedly. All persons, men and women, who are like the fiery, stub-nosed old maid who entered, are preceded by shadow and followed by gross darkness. She could do every kind of work, and, bless us all, how she could scold !

She was a Methodist, more to be odd than anything, Aunt Seth declared ; but no matter why, she was. Truly, she did seem to be crushed forever and completely, but it was only her way. She hid no light under a bushel, but exhorted, prayed, shouted, lost her strength, called every son of man brother, and each of womankind sister, till everybody was sorry or wicked, or both. Mr. Wilson said he did "not give her credit for piety, it was just to be aggravating."

Aunt Rachel, a sweet, disappointed woman, declared mildly that she "would ruther, any day, sit by a clump of Canady thistles than Huldry Moses." She was a distant relative of the Moses family and resided with them.

"Good-afternoon, Huldry," said Mrs. Lane, and a nod all round the quilt greeted her.

"Good-afternoon, Sister Lane, Sister Wilson, I hope I see you well. Don't git up, Sister Lane, here's a chair ; an' I'll hang my bonnet on the post."

She nibbled a sprig of southernwood, which seemed most appropriate.

"I was setting these spare hands to mending harnesses, Huldah," remarked Mrs. Lane.

"Anything, Sister Lane; it's close work, but I don't wear specs yet," throwing a sidelong glance at Aunt Rachel, who did.

Mrs. Lane gave her a harness and some harness thread, a fine double-and-twisted linen yarn. She took them, inquiring, —

"What kind of a pattern are you going to weave, Sister Lane?"

"Bird's-eye, most likely, or fox-and-geese."

"I s'pose you'll make a linen web, Sister Wilson?"

"We're not planning to."

Huldah sighed, a habit of hers, and asked 'Lisbeth, —

"Goin' tew the 'Cademy this fall, Sister 'Lisbeth?"

"I do not know."

"I met your boy this mornin', Sister Harmon, an' ast him why he didn't go to the 'Cademy hisself."

"Phil! our Phil go to the 'Cademy! Well, I never!"

"We're ready to roll up," broke in Mary; and the women pushed back, chatted, and smelled their posies, while the girls, superintended by Louisa, rolled the quilt over the frames as far as it was finished.

Drawing up again, Mrs. Willard inquired, —

"Any of you folks heerd a word of Cynthy Brown, — she 'twas — married Dave Smart?"

"She was a sweet pritty bride as can be," said Mrs. Harmon, "when they 'peared out. I see for myself."

"I have," answered Mrs. Oliver. "You know the Browns air kinder in our family. Rubin's fust cousin married hern,—let me see, yes; that is the how on't. They're gittin' pooty much down at the heel, tenerate. The props seem tew be tumblin' round 'em dretful fast."

"Props don't help them that can't stand 'thout prop-pin'," said Aunt Seth emphatically.

"She ort tew knowed better than tew marry him," pursued Huldý. "He allus was a poor stick, nothin' tew him but a glib tongue an' never was. 'Sides he'd courted more'n one gal 'fore she ever see him, that could be swore to."

Eunice nudged Lavina and both tittered. Huldah sighed and Mrs. Batchelder remarked,—

"Swearin' is master ticklish business, as I tole Seth when he was bent and determined on givin' in testimony 'fore the squire at Plymouth, 'bout Jones's colt. One fall the colt didn't come in from paster' with his other young stock. He thought he see it goin' down the turnpike in a drove some time after, and asked the drover who he bought it of, then sued the man who sold it. He wanted Seth in describin' the critter tew swear it was dark red an' had a white stripe in the forrard, an' not another white hair on him. I tried to head Seth off, an' tole him plain Jones hadn't any sich colt. His had a star in the forrard, one white foot, and I didn't know but more. But, good land! 'twant no use,

not a mite. He flared up smart as tew wimmin tendin' tew their own affairs, an' not mixin' up with law, till I was completely tuckered out an' let him alone, he was so high-headed and sot. Summons come, an' Còurt mornin' he was ready airly, starched bosom, black stock, blue weddin' coat, brass buttons an' all. When he got all fixed up I says to him, says I, 'Seth, afore you make a fool of yourself, le's smoke.' He give me a middlin' queer smile, but filled the pipes agreeable an' lighted 'em. We hadn't smoked skurcely a whiff when Jones's boy pranced through our cheese room entry yellin', 'Pa's found his colt.' Then I spoke up to the boy, says I, 'Star in the forrard?' — 'Yes, ma'am,' says he. 'One white foot?' says I. 'Yes, ma'am,' says he. I eyed Seth, and he won't forgit it tew his dyin' day; but that was all I said. His meet'n' duds come off quick metre, an' he stomped out of the house. I followed him fur as our cheese room, carryin' his ole white hat he'd forgot, an' heerd him mutter, 'Them folks air the alfiredest set of dumb fools I ever see,' an' I didn't blame him a grain."

Again the quilt was rolled up, and they went on discussing Aunt Seth's medical skill, Mrs. Smith's June butter, Mrs. Kidder's tansy cheese, Ruth's fine netting, and so on, to hope of daily stages and the great fact that four weekly newspapers reached the district. Mrs. Oliver Kidder said that Jake Drake's father had given him his freedom, a horse and cart, and some runners,

and he had commenced teaming to Concord and back. Those topics were momentous ; for they well remembered when all mail sent to northern New Hampshire was carried by post-horses once in two weeks, and one newspaper, so infrequently received, was carefully carried from house to house and read as a rare and precious privilege. About four o'clock several young girls went home to prepare supper for their men folks, leaving their mothers to follow them at evening. It was then that Huldý and Aunt Seth came to blows, as it were, when the latter asked, —

“Our minister will come round before long, won't he, Mis' Wilson ?”

“To catechise the children? Yes, soon, he said.”

A short sniff and long sigh preceded Huldý's question.

“Is there trouble, sister; backslidin' or anything?”

“I don't know nothin' 'bout backslidin',” said Aunt Seth, “once in grace, allus in grace.” She had taken the last stitch within her reach, and leaned back in the high rocking-chair, pushed her spectacles high up on her forehead, and spoke in a heavy counter voice.

“Huldý, you've been sisterin' an' insiniwatin' all round the lot this whole blessid afternoon. Now, I hain't no feelin' as tew this matter, fur as Abbygil Batchelder is concerned, not a mite ner grain; but I must mind what's writ, stick tew the law none of us can run from, that's the p'int.”

Huldy put on a lonesome expression, intended to be martyrlike; but it lacked beatitude.

"Go on, Sister Seth."

"I want tew ask a few p'inted questions. Did this new seck come fust singin' free grace? Did they fight Injuns, an' make paths through old-growth pines? Did them Methodists set fire tew trees, pull up the stumps, an' dig the fust crop of p'taters that growed 'mongst their roots? If they did, none of my folks ner Seth's ever heerd on't."

"Have you 'tended any meet'n's, Sister Seth? Do you know if they have the Sperit or not?"

"I never darkened a door tew a Methodis' meet'n', but I've heerd all I want tew. We can't make it out, Seth ner me."

"Well," snapped Huldah, "I s'pose you can say what you're mind to 'cause you're 'lected, tenerate."

"I don't b'leve things wantin' tew, an' as for sayin' I'm 'lected, no sech word was ever spoke by me."

She swayed meekly back and forth in the great rocking-chair, humiliated that such arrogance was imputed to her.

"It's hard judging," said Mrs. Lane; "some Methodis' have lived fit for copy."

Aunt Seth knew the story of John's parents, and replied very gently,—

"Yes, Mis' Lane, sech as you speak on is 'lected whether or no."

The women moved away when the last rows of quilting were reached, and all the girls engaged in fair contest; for whoever set the last stitch would be married first.

"'Lisbeth's hanging back," complained saucy Eunice.

"We all know who she's thinking of," remarked Huldah with a very sour countenance and a shivering sigh over such folly.

'Lisbeth had been given a long chalk line by Mrs. Lane, and came near being last, so there was sincere congratulation in her call as she clipped her thread, —

"There, Eunice, shake the quilt, and we will all be at the wedding."

They stopped when it was partly ripped from the frames, at hearing a step in the entry, a salutation to Louisa; and, gazing at the doorway, their faces, even Huldah's, brightened, for John Mayhew was framed for a second there. He was tall, finely built, with a smoothly shaven face, clear complexion, dark-brown hair, having a glint of gold in it, round his fine white forehead and temples; eyes brown, keen, constant, and sunny; and nose both delicate and strong.

Free grace and foreordination made way before one so true. He received the loving favor of all by right of eminent domain. The scion of a courageous, God-fearing ancestry, his strength was chastened and refined by the bitter sorrow of his boyhood. Strange how it is that by wasting, white-hot conflagrations the spirit-fields are fallowed for rare harvests!

After speaking to his aunt he inquired about all the neighbors, especially Uncle Seth's rheumatism, the King, his bees and hounds; begged a leaf of sweet mint from Ruth's bodice; helped shake and fold the finished quilt; tossed a ball of yarn back and forth with Eunice, and invited himself to her wedding. If he heard a sweet voice talking to Louisa in the kitchen no one perceived it. When his uncle and the boys came to their supper, Mr. Lane asked him to go down to Mr. Wilson's, and say if he would help them finish hoeing the next day, they would help him when he began haying. After the men's supper was cleared away, the long table was quickly set with creamy, green-sprigged china. Platters of cold meat, delicately browned biscuits, crimson tarts, and dark plum-cake, made a notable feast, presided over by Mrs. Lane, as she poured cups of balmy green tea, with a dignity that would be faultless anywhere. When the sun hung low above Sugarloaf, John saddled their horses and led them to the stepping-stone, or fastened the clumsy traces to their arklike wagons; trimmed two stout sticks for the Kidder women; promised to go here and there in cool evenings; and finally those remaining stood in charming old-fashioned way watching roads and fields adown and across which guests were departing, then smiled regretfully at one another because so happy a day was done.

"Now," he said to 'Lisbeth, who leaned against

the curb, calash in hand, "I'll go with you if I may."

She smiled gravely, and they walked silently along over the chordant ledge, down the road to the half-way mark, where many a time he had pulled the roses down within her reach, and broken palm-ferns for her fans, and opened spiny beechnut burrs for her; then he said, intending to declare his love, —

"Come to the old seat, 'Lisbeth."

They went together among the birches, under the sweetbrier, and leaned against the bended trunk. Gold and rose and violet flung flaming banners up the western sky; touched the trees overhead and roundabout; mellowed fields and verdure-clad hills; glowed on the mountains, and threw its gorgeous blazonry deep into the very heart of the Pond.

He understood what love of independence, what desire for freedom as her brothers were free, what shy high spirit, informed that girl; he perfectly understood the strong personality of that womanhood; but still he asked no more than he gladly, proudly gave. It was a life for a life.

What he said straightforwardly and simply, was, —

"'Lisbeth, I love you," unconsciously putting out a hand and brushing back a curling lock blown across her brow. For a moment her steady eyes shone into his own, searching, challenging a soul that dared demand return of love from her; then they grew liquid

soft, making answer fair and true, but her lips only said, "O John!" Then she grew pale and cold, and turned away. He expected hesitation at relinquishing freedom, but not that manner; she was actually going away from him.

"Have you no word for me, not one?"

"No," she sternly replied.

He laid a hand upon her shining hair.

"I saw an answer when you looked at me but now."

"It was folly only."

"'Lisbeth, it was the veriest truth of your soul."

"It cannot be; you know it cannot be. My father would see us both dead first. What right can you urge to him in asking my life?"

"This, 'Lisbeth, that I gave you mine unasked, and am glad that it is so bestowed. My right is God-given. He alone can cancel my just claim."

He was gazing straight into those proud eyes, and she felt that so he would have claimed a disputed crown had he been born to it.

"Whether your father consents is nothing now. Answer for yourself, 'Lisbeth."

She shrank against a tree. He went close, and smoothed the wavy tresses, saying, —

"I am not worthy of this blessing, dear, but I have coveted it for longer than I can tell. I remember nothing to the contrary. If I dream of legal success, you are part of the vision. If I hope for

honor, the best thought of all is you will be a proud wife; and I am poor indeed if I cannot win your love. After all, I shall live and die a beggar, 'Lisbeth."

She raised her head. He had taken a step backward, the caressing hand fallen at his side, his noble features turned to the melting heavens, seemingly unmindful of her. What right had she to wound him so, when he was so chivalric and true, comeliest of all she had ever known, and exalted as to character, yet winningly gracious? Should she hide her heart from him, and make him a perpetual beggar? No; her father might do as pleased him, but he should know the truth. She touched his sleeve, and whispered, "John." The call was tremulous as summer winds across the dewy clovers. His gaze fell full to her shy, radiant face, and great joy illumined his; for he saw the perpetual miracle of love was wrought in her sweet soul.

There was no speech between them for a little while; then with the lofty serenity of one who takes a deliberate and irrevocable oath, he said, "Till death us do part;" and soon they went hand in hand through the glorious dusky eve toward the Wilson farmhouse.

CHAPTER IX

MR. BENSON

THERE was no regular Methodist preaching at Plymouth village; but occasionally an evening service was held in a hall on Haverhill pike, over the brow of the hill above Russell's store.

Bishop Hedding, grand and saintly, had nearly lost his life proclaiming the Word among those hills; and close by where he was so ill, a neat brick church had risen in a shady nook near Eben Blodgett's at West Plymouth. Before it was built, Mr. Blodgett's house or barn had been for almost twenty years a stated preaching station on one side of the village, and Mr. Mudgett's in Holderness on the other.

Methodism was unfashionable all about there. One blessing it enjoyed, the friendship of Judge Livermore, who resided across the river from Plymouth, and was a republican lord paramount. He was a devout Episcopalian, and regarded Methodists as first cousins; somewhat down at the heel, perhaps, but still belonging to the family.

The fact of severe antipathy to the new sect remained, however, and was strengthened by Huldý Moses with her sharp tongue, and by boisterous men like her third

cousin Israel, who, finding both speech and grace free, shouted their appreciation much after the manner of enthusiastic militia-men who massed under their captain's window muster mornings before daylight, and fired tremendous blank cartridges for the twofold purpose of waking him up, and of reasserting their own freedom. To be sure, all churches were burdened by faulty members; but one so radically new as the Wesleyan was much despoiled by any inconsistency.

Men and women from leading circles — that is, from the controlling denomination — came slowly to its fold and faith.

It was not considered aristocratic nor good form to be a Methodist, simply because ruling people were Calvinist to the backbone; and the Calvinists considered the miracle of their planting and upspringing here positive proof that themselves alone were heirs to spiritual dominion in the country, and by parity of reasoning to temporal riches and power. They tolerated no rival doctrine, and only once in a while were they bereft of a valuable member, who was influenced to such action by that moving sympathy which is developed in fine-grained minds towards a cause having for its object the betterment of humanity — not an elect few, but all.

Besides, there was, and please God always will be, a fellow-feeling for the under dog, provided he be an honest and respectable one, whether he be a social, civil,

political, or scientific canine. Such an one never dies. He may have a hard time of it, but he will live, grow, and be a better and bigger dog because of his battles.

Lawyers as a class were kindlier than any other. Love for fair argument and free expression of opinion made them often greatly helpful, court-houses being frequently opened to meetings. Plymouth was in a comparatively serene and Christian state from the fact that the pastor was son to one of Whitefield's friends, and he inherited a spirit of toleration.

Lenity was confined to negatives mostly ; as, for instance, Mr. Benson preached in the Hill schoolhouse the Sunday after the quilting, not exactly by consent, but because no one objected.

A daytime Sabbath service occurred very rarely ; and it brought from long distances those who accepted the new faith, together with others whose hearts needed the balsam of hope.

The circuit-rider was new to them and to the State.

He was a man of ready and abundant humor, like most of his class ; for, though one said of an itinerant preacher that "he could not pray if the wind was in the north-east," and Father Taylor recorded of another that "though he was a leader and commander in Israel, there were times when he was all pikery and worm-wood," such men were uncommon among them.

Service was set for one o'clock, and by a little past twelve those who had journeyed many miles began ar-

riding singly, in groups, on foot and horseback, and in lumbering wagons; coming up the hill from the turnpike, down from its summit under cool maples, along the Bristol highway that tapped the Hill road by the schoolhouse, across pastures and fields.

Saddles and harnesses were thrown over the wall here and there; horses were tethered to bar-posts, trees, and bushes. Then the people grouped on shadowed stones, fringed by brakes and clumps of hardhack and sweet-fern; the women opened their baskets, and all took luncheon, while they inquired after each other's health, children, and crops, or discussed important questions of spiritual welfare, personal and churchly.

A couple of women crossed the road and went through the bars into shade and coolness. They sat upon a fallen tree, and talked low, with a far-away air. Their white leghorn bonnets were lined with black silk, and tied with black ribbon.

There had been no compromise with Grandmother Wilson's cap-border that morning — no attempt at any. It had its own way from its first stately shake as she emerged from her room at breakfast-time, clad in black bombazine, till it finally settled after a grand fashion into the deep bonnet that barely showed above the back seat of the wagon as Mr. Wilson drove out of the dooryard, leaving Lettice and Dorothy alone. She cast one long look across the meadow to the opposite hill, as if searching for some sign of dissent to the

heresy about to be proclaimed, or a token of ill-omen in the smiling sky.

She had drilled Dorothy in a catechism lesson, and left her seated in the east-room with back to doors and windows, till she should memorize a psalm, and repeat it to Lettice without mistake.

Golden-belted bumblebees, brilliant humming-birds, fretted and called outside among the flowers, but she kept to her task till it was done; then she moved her little red chair close to Lettice by the vine-trellised door.

Mrs. Willard and Ruth started for meeting quite early. They spoke a good-morning to Lettice and Dorothy as they passed, going down through the lower field by a farm road to the meadow. They crossed the brook on a pine log, and went into a forest by a wood-path.

Soon Dorothy saw them emerge from the wood, and cross Mr. Moses' field into a road along which some people were travelling. She knew them well enough, — the King and his family, dogs and all. They seemed walking through a rosy sea, so high and strong the clover billows rose and fell.

Two little children, twins, and heirs to the Moses estate, were chasing butterflies over the clover-patch, but demurely fell into line when their parents and Huldý joined the church-going group as it passed their door.

She watched them wind around the white-birch grove, and climb the sloping hillside more than half way to its summit, then turn shortly and follow a beaten path along its stone-specked shoulder, finally disappearing in the far dense growth of sugar maples. Then she saw them no more.

When they were nearly through the close-set trees, so as to see the red schoolhouse beyond, men and boys moved along, while women and girls halted, sat down on logs and stones, removed their heavy shoes, and put on low calfskin or morocco ones. One or two showed handsome knitted patterns on ankle and instep of thin, fine stockings. Young girls fastened on fresh pantalets like their dresses, and falling to their shoes.

Putting the discarded foot-gear out of sight, they went briskly to the bars, where Mr. King had dropped a middle rail to let them through, and stood by to put it up. Ruth pulled a wild rose growing over the wall, and tucked it into her bodice as she went by. Across the road stood the schoolhouse, in a tangle of high grass, daisies, buttercups, thistles, yarrow, and caraway. They broke some seeding caraway heads, and took them in to nibble.

The King sauntered along, giving a familiar nod to one or another whom he knew, the hounds following their master to his seat, then lying down between him and the desk.

As in the Wilson schoolhouse, the floor rose gradually from front bench to rear wall.

The long back seat was devoted to older scholars, flirtations, and heart-burnings. It was also the singers' seat. Thither went Huldry, who sang counter well and truly; thither, also, went sweet-voiced Ruth, her mother sitting by a window that looked over a great patch of mulberry, way down to the blue ripples of New-found.

Quaint little Mrs. John Smith sat on the girls' low front bench. She wore a leghorn bonnet lined with white silk; a figured lavender-colored ribbon went over its crown, close to the flaring brim, and tied under her chin by a carefully knotted double bow.

A delicately tinted crape shawl was thrown loosely around her shoulders, brightening the dark taffeta dress. She carried a nosegay of sweetwilliams.

Tall, angular, white-headed Mrs. Sampson came in with taller, sharper, white-headed Mr. Sampson. She sat down after a sideways fashion, near Mrs. Smith; he clattered along, stubbed his heavy boot toes against a floor crack, stepped on a dog's tail, and at last swung into a seat next the front one. He leaned both elbows on the desk a moment, then settled back, and took a pinch of snuff.

The women generally wore big bonnets, their best for years, with long veils tied over them, which they drew to one side, or folded upon them, at the entry door.

Their dresses were made with short, wide-belted waists, large sleeves, and narrow skirts.

Part of the men were dressed in blue, with brass buttons, and some wore summer frocks. Girls in home-made dresses, tiers, pantalets, and cape bonnets, and boys in spencers, long trousers, and mostly barefooted, completed the hushed audience that slowly fanned itself on the women's side with peacock or soft gray goose feather fans to the music of a stony brook under the west windows.

Only a brief time before service, John and his aunt passed along outside, and composedly entered the full room. A slightly increased flutter of fans showed she was an unusual attendant. She had said to Mr. Lane, —

“I guess Loizy and the boys will go to meeting with you, and I'll run over with John.”

She remarked to her daughter on Saturday, —

“It ain't no use, Loizy, not a mite, to set stock-still. Old roots are hard to dig up, and changing opinions in Mr. Wilson's mind is pretty much like pulling up knot-grass, and setting vi'lets in. It will take pretty stiddy cultivation. I'm going to stand by Lucy's boy, and I shall begin by going to meeting with him to-morrow.”

Her calm Friend face, gray taffeta gown and figured white crape shawl, even her heavy gold beads, were carefully noted, and received complimentary mention after meeting.

Soon after Mrs. Lane and John were seated, a handsome gray horse came in sight, up the Bristol road. His rider sat him like a guardsman, and saddle-bags depended on either side of him.

Two brethren, who waited outside, hastened up as he halted, and welcomed him. He took a Bible and hymn book from the saddle-bags, and went in; while they quickly threw the saddle off the horse, removed the wearying bits, tethered him to a strong sapling by a long halter, and followed Mr. Benson into the house.

The new preacher was five feet, ten inches high, erect, rather slender. Physical and mental strength, endurance and energy, those shrewd people saw in their first keen search of him.

Formerly captain of a military company, when he dropped sword and epaulets for holy weapons, he still retained a martial bearing that suited him well. His countenance was very thoughtful, noble, and sternly mild.

His features were fine, with very deep blue eyes, and broad white forehead marked by heavy brows. His dark hair was long, according to custom, combed back without parting, and rolled over the coat collar. He wore a clerical suit of black, buttoned closely, and a high white stock about his neck.

After entering he kneeled on the floor by the teacher's desk a moment, then rose, and, seating himself,

remained with folded hands till the last loiterer was still.

He read the hymn beginning, —

“Come, ye sinners poor and needy.”

Every eye was fastened on him he read so well. A singing-master of the valley afterward said of him that “his voice was tuned to viols, whether he sang or spoke.”

A good choir sang; for the Pemigewassett Musical Association was twenty years old, and its instructors had come from that society.

One of the Smith boys led. Nipping the tuning-fork between his teeth, he got the pitch, and gave it to the rest, Ruth sounding the treble note from him, Huldý the counter; and finally all blended together as they rose.

After prayer and reading of Scripture they sang again, —

“Ho! every one that thirsts draw nigh.”

During the last verse the people adjusted themselves to listening attitudes.

Mrs. Smith smoothed her long lace veil from bonnet to shoulder, and down under her arm, then folded her hands meekly over the sweetwilliams, while others loosened their shawls or shut their fans. On the men’s side, Mr. Field took out his snuffbox, rapped it very quietly for him, helped himself, passed it across the

aisle to Mr. Sampson, nodded invitations to several near and remote, smothered a sneeze in his immense meeting bandanna, and, after some scuffling of feet, returned the box to his trousers pocket.

When the hymn ended, young men gave their waistcoats a pull, touched the knots of their wide checked neckkerchiefs; one of the hounds turned over; and all was silence.

Mr. Benson had improved every moment studying those people so new, belonging to a social world hitherto unknown to him. At last he concluded that they rightly belonged to those rocky, sunkissed hills, those towering pines and rooted oaks, to those rough fields, where herd's grass and clover, waiting the mower, billowed around and over great rocks. They seemed to him mighty, honest, purposeful, yet intensely unique and dramatic.

He rose and read a text, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Wesley's call was to "all who desire to flee from the wrath to come and lay hold on eternal life;" and there his successors left it.

Free grace, free will, knowledge of sins forgiven, and a life meet for such blessing, they daily taught, and it was the substance of that day's sermon.

Scarcely an amen interrupted till the preacher sat down and folded his hands, adding soon after, in a primitive, Methodist, good-time-for-all fashion, —

“There is liberty, brethren and sisters; speak, sing, or pray.”

Israel Smith, who felt in a blind way that something must be done, drew the air in through his closed teeth, and shouted, “Hallelujah! hallelujah! glory!” in ascending scale.

Mr. Benson looked searchingly from beneath those heavy brows at the powerful shouter.

A low, distinct hiss from one of two young men, strangers, brought his head erect, and gave a martial vibration to the words, “There is liberty for worship here,” accenting the word worship. It sufficed.

A half-hour was occupied by various exercises, that grievous error of the new sect, allowing women to “testify,” obtaining without hindrance.

Huldah, who possessed a deep voice, and was called gifted in prayer, petitioned heartily for the “scoffers who set in the middle seat by the aisle.” The amens to her request were numerous and forcible, especially when she besought that “their hearts might be broke, till the fine flax, if there was any, should be separated and made fit for use.”

Their speech, especially upon religious topics, abounded in figures drawn from their environment, and even their language excelled that day. Song abounded, and many a saintly hymn floated out and died away on far breezes. Subdued amens and glories were frequent, for it was a day in a thousand to the worshippers.

Notices, not being regarded as a devotional exercise, were given after meeting; so he pronounced the benediction, and then said, —

“Providence permitting, there will be a meeting this evening at early candlelight in Brother Mudgett’s barn. Next Sunday I shall be at West Plymouth, and in six weeks I shall be here again.”

Then they heartily welcomed him. A hand touched John’s sleeve, and his aunt said, —

“Let me go with you, and speak to him.”

He had hoped she would; but in accord with the respect shown toward elder people, he left her to do as she was minded. He stepped quickly into the open space, saying, —

“I am John Mayhew.”

“John! the name of one beloved.”

“My aunt, Mrs. Lane.”

[“I am glad to see you, Sister Lane.”

A contradictory, cheery smile made denial of such relationship.

“You are not a Methodist?”

“No; but I mistrust truth is truth, and I’ve heard it to-day. Come home with us and have a cup of tea, and rest till it is cooler.” He hesitated.

“Tain’t a mite mor’n half a mile farther to where you are going, and there is a nice path for horses the way we come, John and me. John,” she added decisively, “go out and saddle Mr. Benson’s horse.”

She waited till the minister picked up his books; and when they came out, the King, who had helped put the beautiful iron-gray in marching order, was remarking while pulling up the last buckle, "Travellin' all the time, is he, an' this is his house an' home? It's a powerful underpinnin'," said he, drawing back and examining the horse, "an' master well built; but as tew the rest, it's a plaguey poor tavern for a rainy day, with no cover 'thout's that ole white surtout."

Mr. Benson, smiling gravely, said, "I look for a better house," and added, packing his Bible and hymn book into the saddle-bags, which contained wearing-apparel, books, and writing materials, "You see my storehouses are safe and dry, brother."

John introduced them; and the King remarked, "I'm a middlin' poor brother, that's a fact; but I liked your sermon, an' sensed it tew."

Again, while he jumped into the saddle, those prim people crowded around him; their good-bys following to the bars.

Girls and women going towards Mrs. Lane's had preceded the preacher, changed their shoes, and were ready to join the little company winding slowly along down the steep hillside, by clumps of sweet fern and feathery brakes. The King took delight in pointing out fields of corn, potatoes, wheat, and oats, explaining their differing shades of green. He named the owners of farm-houses perched on rugged hills, or nestled at their feet,

and of mountains that girded the lake. He told the circuit-rider, "That big house yender, acrost them woods, a little lower'n us, an seems set in grass an' trees, is Thomas Wilson's. He ain't reely a Metherdish, that can be swore tew," added he with a twinkling eye.

The Moses family stopped at their own house, and the Kings said good-by where the others turned into the forest road.

Never had Mr. Benson passed over such a route, fringed by pale marsh-rosemary blooms and tiny cells of flowering mosses, the rose-purple of nightshade, and gold-thread's trefoil leaf. Milk-white heads of moosewood flecked the brown depths far and near.

Partridges whirled off so quickly, they only caught the flutter of speckled wings; and red-bonneted woodpeckers flew about, laying sharp ears against gray tree-boles for sound of any wood fretter; while squirrels flitted over logs. Mr. Benson's expressive features were radiant with enjoyment; even the iron-gray blinked knowingly at the happy dwellers in those bosky coverts, as they whisked or flew from close by, where, at each step, he sank below the fetlock into spongy turf.

After tea Mr. Benson sat with the Lane family an hour out of doors, beside stalks of bursting hollyhocks; then he besought a blessing on that house, and went his way, John walking beside his saddle. By the brook beyond the Wilson house they met 'Lisbeth and her father, who had walked the last two miles of hilly road

coming home from church ; and John introduced them. Some quality in Mr. Wilson's greeting, John's evident anxiety, and 'Lisbeth's slight confusion, carried intelligence to his intuitive mind, and he felt strangely drawn to thought of them. Beyond Mr. Batchelder's he said, —

“I know my way very well now, and you must go no farther. If I am spared, in six weeks I shall see you again.”

John had removed his hat, and stood beside the saddle. Father Benson laid a hand upon his head and blessed him.

CHAPTER X

HAYING

THE Monday after the meeting Mr. Wilson began haying. He did not swing a scythe beside younger men, but he carefully overlooked the work.

For help he had Mr. Tyrrell, who worked for him year in and out, and two young men from across the pond, engaged for haying and harvesting.

“Wholesome an' gritty, well-lookin' an' mannerly fellers,” Lettice said.

His extra men were Francis and Robert Lane, Phil Harmon, and John Mayhew. Mr. Wilson took them to the starting point before six o'clock that morning.

“This is goin' to be a great hay-day,” he said. “We'll

take the orchard first; this timothy is jest ripe. Can you mow a square piece up to the Injy wheat, cross to the ledge, back along the clover, an' up here, by ten o'clock, Mr. Tyrrell?"

"Yes, sir; easy."

"Then begin right here, this side of the yellor dock an' pigweed. Who goes first?"

One of two was sure to lead, Phil or John, for both were skilled athletes in field or rustic sports.

Neither replied, though either held himself as a bent bow, ready for release. Phil made no sign, scarcely daring to assert superiority, and then, having won 'Lisbeth, it was polite to give his rival the lead; and John was silent, for he did not care.

They were a goodly pair, waiting with hats pushed up above their foreheads. Each rested the heel of a snath on the ground, and leaned on its bow-shaped length. Beside the feet of each a curved blade, whetted to a hair edge, flashed upward in the sun.

They were clad in blue trousers and white shirts, smoothly ironed. A leathern belt girded each waist, leaving their arms and shoulders easy, and their collars were loosened for freedom and coolness.

At last Mr. Lane said, —

"Well, John, you used to be good for sunthin' days like these; strike in: Phil will foller."

"Yes, sir," answered both, raising themselves erect at the word.

Mr. Wilson kept pace with the eager, even steps of the comely mower whom his mind favored, but his foreordained conscience disallowed. He was distinctly proud of John's learning; and then, how he would like to go to the village, and, while mother stayed with 'Lisbeth, go into court with high head to hear John argue before the jury.

If 'Lisbeth married Phil, she would be like other women in twenty years, he told himself; then thought, "Would she? Was she like other girls? While she skimmed milk or spun linen for Phil, would not the pathos of those tender eyes turn to the sadness of an endless loss?"

"Now aim for that great rock, keepin' close to the clover. I'll be there," he said, and pulled his hat down hard, and strode across the field. He could not give her to error, though a lifetime of sorrow were the consequence. There must be no infringement of divine or family law, if every human hope were traversed.

"She must marry Phil, that's all!" he said half-aloud, as he sat down on a projecting edge of the boulder.

The two young men were also musing of 'Lisbeth. As for Phil, feeling sure he should marry her, he was thinking how much better he should like her if she was more like — well — Eunice, who was so full of spirit, so unambitious, who would run contentedly by his side, never asking questions; but then, John and

everybody else should know that when Phil Harmon took his pick he selected the best.

John was waiting, sure of being right; so, when they met the farmer at the rock, each man was settled in his mind. Opposite him the mowers paused and struck the ends of their snaths firmly on the ground, thus throwing the blades high as their shoulders. They carefully wiped them from heel to tip with a wisp of grass, and immediately their scythes rang musical and clear from the rasp of whetstones. It was a heart-some, pastoral symphony; and, being finished, John asked, —

“Where now?”

“Take a bee line for the wash-rock.”

An untoward word, for both men saw 'Lisbeth framed in the well-room doorway just beyond the rock, one hand on Dorothy's head, and Lettice behind them, watching their work. The effect of the picture upon Phil was very soon manifest.

“Gosh!” said Tom under his breath.

“Land sakes alive!” exclaimed Lettice. “Phil's plannin' tew take John's swath, an' fust time round, tew. 'Tain't fair. It's meaner'n dirt.”

They saw the forward man made no haste to take the challenge up.

“Dear me, suz! he'll come by,” whispered Lettice; but Jack drove one hand into his pocket, and holding a sling with malice aforethought towards a blackbird

in the other, said, important as one of mankind always is, be he callow or gray, —

“Ain’t you scairt! John’ll begin to lay out that grass ’fore long. He ain’t mowin’ yit.”

Swish, swash, swish, swash, went the scythes in regular cadence, rhythmic and true; but not until the glittering blade of his antagonist flashed beside his heel did John give any sign; then, as Jack predicted, he began to mow. Honey-bees flew angrily away from full stores of nectar. The robber baron bumblebee, clad in black and gold, clung to his cup of clover sweets until its stalk fell under him, then with deep curses pursued his quest. The bobolink, free of the tormenting boy, swung from a head of herd’s grass, twinkled his merry eyes, and poured a whole throatful of laughter over the battle-field. The young men worked fair and true. There were no straggling spears standing behind them, and nowhere in that mowing land did any man perform his task smoother, even_{er}, or better. Before them the ripe grass trembled rank on rank as it felt their cleaving strokes. Heavy-headed herd’s grass, feathery redtop, and rosy-celled clover bent and fell in straight rows beside their path.

Their hats were pushed from their beaded foreheads, the light locks of one and warm brown of the other were wet as if they had been plunged into dripping dews. Their strong chests heaved and sank to the deep, regular, rapid breath. They gripped the hafts of

the snaths vice-like ; the sinews of their arms showed beneath the moist, clinging sleeves, hard and tense as ropes, and the veins swelled out like whipcords from neck and temples.

"That's jest like boys ; they need gardeens, both on 'em," said Lettice ; "not a mite of breakfast, an' cuttin' up an' actin' like that. I can't take my eyes off of 'em, an' I darsent look, nuther ; dew tell, is Phil comin' by ?"

"No," said 'Lisbeth quietly.

"Praise be tew massy ! Well, I never did ! An' there's my coffee bilin' an' sizzlin' over onto them coals, an' the biskit a-burnin' in the baker, an' here I stan' seein' them boys makin' fools of themselves."

"Let 'em burn, an' bile over, an' sizzle," screamed Jack ; "who wants breakfast, anyway ?"

"John's kinder pullin' his heel-taps outen the way," remarked one of the men ; for all had kept alongside the combatants. Exactly so ; he drew away inch by inch, so when he reached the goal Phil was four strokes behind.

"Hurrah !" shouted Tom and Jack, turning somersaults on the dewy windrows.

"Yer darned smart critters, that's all I've got tew say," commented one of the men, as they turned back to finish their swaths ; and Mr. Wilson remarked dryly, "You boys better fling them scythes down by the grin'-stone, an' keep still till breakfast. I shall want both for pitching this afternoon."

Shouldering the dulled scythes, they went through the well-room where 'Lisbeth was. The first one smiled contentedly as he passed; but she gave him no compliment, though she said, "That was splendid, Phil," to the other.

"The upshot is," Lettice told both, "you won't have a single mouthful fit tew eat 'thout Mrs. Wilson's seen tew it while I've been standin' here like a nat'ral born fool, watchin' your silly pranks, an' lettin' everything spile."

"Never mind," said John; "it will take a good deal to ruin one of your breakfasts."

"It's my 'pinion, John Mayhew, that after you've tried tew wash down burnt biskits with smoky coffee, you'll feel an' act some slower," said she, stepping down into the kitchen.

After breakfast Tom and Jack with spreading-sticks threw the grass evenly and thinly about to dry upon the stubble. When it was cured, the men raked it into knee-high windrows, which they divided into heaps. At last Mr. Wilson drove his six-foot oxen, tackled to a great cart, between the heaps, and pitchers on each side threw them in, to be trodden down hard by frolicking boys, and then drawn to the barn and stowed away in the deep bay.

At early twilight, when the men were resting prone on the greensward by the east door, or fitted new teeth into broken rakes, or cut fresh heel-straps for scythe

snaths, young Symonds went to help Lettice at milking. Phil went home, and John caught sight of Mr. Wilson beyond the upper field-bars, by a thick blossoming clump of red and white roses, and leisurely crossed to him. After a short talk on general topics, John quietly but proudly stated his special errand.

"Mr. Wilson, I came here to ask for 'Lisbeth."

"What?"

"I wish to marry your daughter," he replied, breaking a rose from its stalk.

"You don't want no such thing."

"I am sure I do."

"An' I know better. Jest look at it. You're goin' to be a lawyer, prob'ly be let in next November; then you want to begin housekeepin'. Is that sense?"

"Oh, sir, you mistake my judgment."

"What then — must wait for cases? She may be gray and I dead afore they come."

Love, in the sense of affection for a sweetheart, Mr. Wilson had dutifully lived through, and been none the worse for it, nor much the better; but its memory had grown to be quite like the lavender scents of the great linen-chests which once held his wife's household marriage portion, goodly enough, but faint and uncertain.

To his mind money and duty were the chief good. He knew no duty of loving thought, as against his iron will; but obeying dogma and church behests, that was duty.

“Considering what I ask, an exact statement of my prospects is fair and right,” said John, unheedingly pulling off the crimson rose-petals one by one. “Squire Baker proposes a place in his office at reasonable terms of partnership. You know that means competence; and my first thought will be given to making a suitable home for ’Lisbeth.”

Mr. Wilson was fascinated; there was no denying it. Such straightforwardness, simple honesty, and faith in himself were fetching, and a delicate affection that quivered in the lover’s voice as he finished drove a keen shaft well through Mr. Wilson’s iron-mailed prejudices, and almost touched his heart; but he gathered himself together and went on, —

“You’re a glib talker; but s’posen there ain’t business enough for two, what then? ’Tain’t like turnin’ furrers for a livin’.”

“There is now, and will be, sufficient for both; if not, Squire Baker would help me in Portsmouth or Boston.”

“’Tain’t no use talkin’; you don’t reely know what town you are goin’ to live in. Do you s’pose, with every feller round here and t’other side of the pond, down to the foot on’t, over to the Plains, an’ out to the village, plaguein’ an’ pesterin’, I’m goin’ to keep ’Lisbeth forty years for anybody? ’Tain’t likely.”

“Suppose we leave it to ’Lisbeth?”

“We won’t fool any longer. You’re a good man

mostly, but you won't suit for a son-in-law. 'Tain't possible, fur as I see. No man can have my gal that sets the doctrines behind him. If I knew this would kill us all thrée, I would not change a syllable."

"Wait, Mr. Wilson. If I promise that in all matters of belief she shall be absolutely free, how will you answer?"

"Jest the same; 'twould resk it all: an' I tell ye ag'in I'd speak these words if I knew 'twould kill us."

Each syllable was spoken deliberately, mercilessly; but an undaunted face fronted him.

"Shall I renounce my mother's creed?"

"Believin' it?"

"Yes."

"Then every living soul ought to despise you for a low-lived critter."

"So, indeed, should I be; a perjurer in my own sight, in yours, in 'Lisbeth's, and before heaven itself. Plainly and truly, it is most dear to me; but my mother enjoined as a rule of life, careful respect and toleration for religious opinions. If 'Lisbeth casts her lot with me she shall be entirely free in respect to these things."

"Never utter another word on this subject. Do you hear? Never."

"But I am sure to."

"Why, wh—"

“Love for your daughter will compel speech.”

“No; you’ll stop right here. It’s wastin’ breath.”

“Very well. I shall speak till one of us is dead.”

“Mean you won’t give this up?”

“Precisely, Mr. Wilson.”

“I’m goin’ to settle it right here, once for all. I’m tired of bein’ tormented. Seems as if I hadn’t stepped off’n our door rock this six months, lumberin’, plantin’, sowin’, to mill or to meetin’, ’thout bein’ follered up. One is awful forrard helpin’ chain a log, another hops out of the woods as I’m footin’ it alongside of the oxen, or comes in nigh dusk to swap some seedlin’ p’taters or cat-eye beans; an’ every livin’ one hantin’ me to ask the same question you’ve dogged me across the road for. Why don’t they try the old fashion of goin’ to spellin’-school, an’ parin’-bees, an’ huskin’-s, an’ askin’ to see a gal home, instid of chasin’ me up garrit an’ down cellar, into the cornfield, an’ all over the lot.”

John smiled in spite of himself, remembering a shy girl in camlet cloak and big hood, who always left them all behind the others because she did not love them, and him because she did. Her father, unmindful of such wandering thoughts, went on, —

“I’m tired out, an’ so I’ve put a stop to the whole business.”

“How?”

“By tellin’ the last one before you to marry ’Lisbeth, an’ let me alone. Now I hope you’ll take no for an

answer, an' ain't layin' out to bother me all along consarnin' it."

"I know I shall, Mr. Wilson."

"Why must you fuss an' trouble us? But you 'pear sot that way. If you b'leved the doctrines, you'd be the very one mother 'n' me would pick out for our child; for we are sure that humanly speakin' there ain't a weak spot ner a mean one in ye. If any man sh'd say John Mayhew wronged a soul, I sh'd know he lied; but 'tain't no use, John, not a grain, for you go where error is taught, an' foller it. You can't be a hypocrite, ner see the sin of your ways, neither one; an' I can't run counter to the commandments, so I've put temptation out of the way."

"You have consented to marriage if this man gains her consent?"

"I have passed my word."

"To whom, may I ask?"

"To a likely feller with cattle and sense to boot, — Philip Harmon."

"Has he spoken to 'Lisbeth?"

"I'm sure I dunno, nor care; he's goin' to marry her, an that's enough."

John felt an icy grip at his heart as he dwelt on the almost absolute power of such a father, augmented, as it was sure to be, by churchly admonition and reproof. She was a loyal dweller in Mr. Ward's priestly fold, and subject to its discipline. Himself and the girl

were in sore straits, and he was silent for some time, weighing the matter carefully, and concluding what further words he had better speak.

"Truly," thought Mr. Wilson, "John is very pale indeed, but quiet and wise." He could tell 'Lisbeth truthfully that he relinquished her easily. Every thing appeared so much better than when they reached the wash rock that morning. Steadily John commenced again, —

"Phil has not visited 'Lisbeth?"

"I dunno;" he began to be anxious.

"Suppose she refuses him?"

"That is out of the case."

"It would make a difference?"

"Not a particle."

"Do you propose marriage between them in any event?"

"I do."

"Compelling her if need be?"

"We're all under law; my child is no exception."

"Then obedience will be demanded?"

"Her mother an' me know best what's right, an' she'll be told. Neither parents nor children can set aside parental authority; it's above both."

A quick fear seized Mr. Wilson, and he strode close to his brave opponent.

"Look here, if you run to her you'll both git inter trouble. She's goin' to marry Phil. If he's feared of her, I ain't. If he dassent ask, I'll see to it. Keep

your own side of the hedge, will you, and let my child alone?"

Somehow Mr. Wilson felt half beaten in spite of his high phrases; for surely he had not found such a very pliant boy as would run up the road simply because he was ordered to go.

"Your warning comes too late, Mr. Wilson; I have spoken to her, and she sent me to you."

Fiercely her father demanded, —

"Is that all? Did she speak for herself?"

"She did. If Phil has your promise, 'Lisbeth's is pledged to me."

"You can't hold her agin my authority, an' you shall not."

"All law, all righteousness, Mr. Wilson, condemns what your intolerance proposes. I will not bind myself to silence, and my reply is this: Without yielding my own belief, with a sacred regard for 'Lisbeth's, respecting your lawful rights as her father, and zealously guarding them all, what I can win I shall take in proper fashion and in open day."

The last vestige of sympathy and admiration was smothered in the elder man by such a reply.

"Your free will seems to need a little guidin'. You've kinder taken the bits between your teeth, an' kicked over the traces. What do you mean?"

"You heard my answer," said John, breaking another rose from the full stock, and starting homeward.

CHAPTER XI

CATECHISING CHILDREN

JOHN came to the house no more, but Mr. Wilson's tactics were direct. He set his house in order, lest his opponent's declared persistency should overcome at last.

The lovers met occasionally at a neighbor's, and for the rest, waited with what grace they could for a change in him who so sternly traversed their hopes, not certain that reversal of opinion would ever come.

Meanwhile, Mr. Benson was gaining ground to the extent of a secure and lasting foothold. His singing and commanding presence mightily supplemented the winning proclamation of a love unshackled, unpriced, and all-embracing. Barriers to Calvinistic preserves were certainly breaking down in places. That, of course, made no end of trouble for the lovers, each defection imbittering Mr. Wilson more and more. He was not quite consistent, however; for he so delighted in argument, that as often as the iron-gray passed up and down the road, so frequently he found himself with only a stone wall between him and its rider. The stern "Good-morning, sir," ran into controversy as naturally as water runs down hill; and many a time the dirt was

dry round a half-hoed hill of corn or potatoes before he returned to it.

Admiration of one who overcame in argument was a hidden law written in his members; therefore, that sweet-spirited man, skilled in polemics, possessed a definite power over him. He often went back to hoe, rake, or waiting oxen, rubbing his eyebrows perplexedly, wondering if he had really lost a perfectly plain argument. At such times he snapped Mr. Tyrrell very shortly, or frightened the patient cattle by a fierce whip-cut that sent them pulling through their bows; but he was sure to call, "Wa-hish, Bright, whoa there, Golden," and leave them to chew their cuds and lazily switch flies while he went, oxgoad in hand, to the wall the next time that white hat and martial rider showed above it.

Mr. Wilson failed to see that he held human deductions with a tenacity and loyalty owed only to divine law. He did not consider that men degrade omnipotent, immortal primal reason when they fear harm to the living word from discussion of any human theory whatsoever. Blest be that hastening day when dogma, with intolerance and hate, its twin offspring, shall make way before the overcoming grace of lives modelled by the one perfect creed,—the Master's Sermon on the Mount.

In the August following Mr. Wilson's encounter with John by the rosebushes, he called upon his pastor, Mr.

Ward, and laid the whole case before that worthy and exemplary man, who listened to the statement sincerely grieved for such a gracious member of his flock and her much-tormented father.

Mr. Ward was—the pastors of that church had ever been rare men—a person of genuine piety, and of superior wisdom.

The severer doctrines of the creed distressed him; but he was a loyal soul, and as he had heard, so he taught faithfully, to the great edification of the congregation, except one of the deacons, and perhaps a male member or two, who deemed that he expounded faith to the detriment of cardinal dogma, predestination, and the like. As minister, he was next friend to all church members and their families; the ordained sharer of their cares and hopes; their helper, and, if need be, their chastiser. The trouble of 'Lisbeth's touched him deeply; for she was the earliest fruit of his priestly harvests, and had always been a teachable, happy girl.

He had already determined to make a pastoral visit to that corner of the churchly heritage, catechise the children, and pray with some ailing members of his fold; so he told Mr. Wilson the visit would be paid immediately, and he would find opportunity for speech with 'Lisbeth at the same time, as the children were to meet at Mr. Wilson's house.

On the day set, all household preparations were early made, so no domestic confusion should disturb the half-

religious day. A Sabbath air gradually enveloped the household, as wheel and loom were left, cards and reels hung up before ten o'clock. The children were clad in their best; and Dame Wilson, prim and stern, clothed in a lilac-sprigged calico gown, her cap-border tied down peacefully with lilac ribbon, rehearsed them in catechism and psalms, after which they were allowed to go circumspectly into the front yard; but out of respect to the visitor, and also to their Sunday garments, they must not run nor be noisy. After a while Mr. Ward arrived. The boys pulled their caps off, and bowed, while Dorothy courtesied very demurely. He patted their thick locks, drew his eyebrows together anxiously, and said to Mr. Wilson, "I do hope, Mr. Wilson, I do hope these young children of yours will never know the disaster sure to follow church doctrines lightly held or openly defied, but I have grave fears for the rising generation."

The boys looked up at him awestruck, dimly conscious of belonging to some mysterious force or other, which was advancing to be confronted by another terrible power, whether bodily or not was a question; liable at any moment to break forth in some unknown fashion, from what place they could not tell, and stalk up and down those roads to the general detriment.

Those little catechumens sat down on the front doorstep after he went into the house, full of misery from a mixture of emotions, caused partly by solemn thoughts

revolving in their minds, the general state of repression about the house, and their Sabbath clothes. They were moved, also, very acutely after a while by the fact that it was a dreamy, hazy, golden day, and gem-tinted butterflies were flying over the sweetwilliams and canterbury-bells; and again, there was a leather sling in Tom's pocket, while a chipmunk whisked hither and thither over and through the high stone wall opposite.

Mr. Wilson had not confided to his wife the principal reason for that ministerial visit; but he determined to take time by the forelock, and transfer her to some scene of usefulness other than the fore-room, so the most important matter relating to 'Lisbeth's besetment and duty might be reached and settled before dinner.

"Mother," he said, after a reasonable time for general inquiry after each other's health, and so on, "Mother, where's them boys an' 'Lisbeth?"

"The boys are on the doorstep, and 'Lisbeth just stepped out to put a tier on Dorothy."

He went into the kitchen, returning immediately, hat in hand.

"I guess Lettice needs you, mother, so 'st to git dinner goin' a little faster; an' I'll run out to call Mr. Tyrrell, an' help him put up the oxen."

Passing out of the door, he said, "'Lisbeth, your mother's busy, an' I'm goin' into the field a minute; you go into the fore-room an' visit with Mr. Ward."

"Yes, sir."

Lettice, having donned new cap and apron, was preparing the midday meal in a subdued fashion ; but she found time to read her employer like a book. She had distrusted him since he told them that his children and those of families in the vicinity were to be catechised at his house.

She happened to be at the dresser when he sent his wife into the kitchen, and her alert understanding took in the truth.

Her first thought was to say that no assistance was desired, but she finally concluded to let matters alone at present ; and so 'Lisbeth was left to the counsel of a sagacious overseer.

Once, when Lettice went to the dresser for a large blue platter, she saw through the open door the girl's pale face at one side of the west window, gazing painedly far up through the red-fruited cherry trees ; and on the other an equally anxious and disquieted countenance, whose large gentle eyes were fixed entreatingly on his listener. What after passed between them she did not note ; but Mr. Ward brought to the bountiful table the appearance of one whose duty is well performed, and 'Lisbeth was in better spirits than had lately been her wont.

Children's meeting in the afternoon was exceedingly quaint and sweet. All were dressed in Sunday suits and manners ; so were their parents.

Mr. Tyrrell unharnessed and unsaddled the horses,

put them into the barn, and backed the wagons to one side, as neighbor after neighbor arrived.

Lettice received the people in the east-room, and paid special attention to the children; bright, clear-faced, strong-willed lads and lasses they were, every one. They trod softly on the shining yellow floor, and hushed their voices replying to Lettice as she took off their hats and bonnets, smoothed them out generally, settled the women's caps, and marshalled them into the fore-room, where the children were seated in a semi-circular row, with their parents behind them. The first-comers, while waiting for the rest, amused themselves by observing their tow locks and rosy faces in the mirror between the south windows, and the exciting hunting scenes pictured on the walls. They were much awed by a mourning-piece, so called, that hung high on the wall in a mahogany frame, where, beneath the most flourishing but pathetic willow, a female mourner, clad in faultless weeds and low-cut bodice, leaned on a tombstone, and held in one long hand an immense handkerchief, ready to cover her face as soon as the admiring spectators should realize her grief and how beautifully she bore it.

Upon a high mantel were two brass candlesticks, and above them hung a copy of the Declaration of Independence, in a narrow frame.

A delicate lustral bowl filled with sweetwilliams and bachelor's buttons was on the spindle-legged table, and

beside it lay a large Bible, a copy of Watts's hymns, and Bunyan's immortal parable.

Several books of history, philosophy, and essays stood on a tall desk between the west windows and a corner china closet, whose glass door disclosed Mrs. Wilson's new mulberry set, and some finely cut glassware. A huge fireplace was filled with fir boughs, that scented the room with balsamic odors.

For two hours Mr. Ward listened to recitals of catechism and psalms, sometimes altogether, sometimes singly. He questioned one and another; told them stories of good children and a little Bible history.

"I think," said the excellent pastor, his fine face beaming upon the children, "I really do think you have tried to learn and understand, and you have greatly cheered my heart.

"Our duties are many, and next to love for God and our parents is love of country. I want all of you, the boys in particular, to learn the Declaration of Independence before school opens. I shall visit your school soon after it begins, and when examinations are over I will instruct you concerning it and the men who made it. I am pleased to bring a notice from Mr. Mason, who desired me to say he will begin singing-school in this district the second Monday evening in September, at early candlelight."

He gave a gracious word to each child as it went out, then congratulated the parents for that they had been

so strenuous in matters of instruction as to doctrine, and also that many of the little ones were in the psalms ?

“Our Jim couldn’t help that,” said Mrs. Powell. “He’s in mischief pretty much all the time; an’ we makes him set right down an’ say all he knows, an’ learn ten more bran-new verses. That’s his punishment, reg’lar.”

“Who hears him ?”

“Mr. Powell’s mother. She’s kinder old, an’ her time ain’t wuth much, but she’s trooly great on Scriptor.”

Jim appeared at the door that moment. “Come here, my little man,” said Mr. Ward. “Do you know most of the psalms ?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I hear your grandmother instructs you ?”

“Yes, sir,” shamefacedly, and tugging with all his might at a brass pants button.

“I hope you love her ?”

Mrs. Powell’s anxious appearance was a study ; so was Jim’s. He had repeated catechism and chapter faultlessly, now it was “no fair,” he told himself, to be teasing a boy that way. He was honest too ; so he pulled harder at the button, and a high color flew to the roots of his hair, as he answered defiantly,—

“No, sir.”

“Why, James !”

"I don't; ner I don't like psalms, an' if I grow to be a man I won't never read a single one!"

The poor boy ran out during the amazed pause that followed his short speech, and said to the boys, —

"Mother'll warm my jacket, but I swanny, I'm glad I said it, lick or no lick."

"Here, James," called 'Lisbeth, who had followed him out; "come back and tell Mr. Ward you were sorry when grandma was sick a while ago."

"Course I was, she had such pain, an' couldn't sleep, ner nuthin'; but if she could die 'thout bein' sick, she might, an' welcome, for all me."

"O James, you would care if she died!"

"Mother says she'd be better off, an' — an' — I shouldn't care a cent, 'Lisbeth."

'Lisbeth returned to assist in passing refreshments. Mrs. Harmon must have the receipt for Lettice's fruit-cake before she went home, and she went into the kitchen to get it, followed by more women, who had other varieties of domestic solicitude, — receipts for pickles, jellies, and barberry marmalade, borrowing a little alum to set a color, or a small piece of indigo to strengthen one. While they were receiving those common attentions, Mr. Ward discoursed to his male members as to unsettling of doctrine and kindred dangers, and expressed satisfaction for the zeal of that district in such respects; yes, he was glad in his heart for that exemplary part of his charge. He was a goodly shep-

herd, standing there among his flock after the women returned.

He was tall and slender, having fine large features and dark-blue eyes. He possessed "a heavenly temper, and was so pure in life no evil thing could be said of him." He was also very gracious in manner, and fairly glowed with the inspiring visit, perfect, except for Jim's defection in the matter of psalms and his grandmother.

There was a definite note of satisfaction in good-bys spoken when the sun hung an hour high above Sugarloaf.

Mr. Wilson walked beside his pastor's saddle some distance; and as they went by some children gathering sweet flag beside the brook, the little ones bowed and courtesied. Mr. Ward raised his hat, saying kindly, —

"I see you mind your manners, children."

CHAPTER XII

MEETING BETWEEN MR. WARD AND MR. BENSON

As soon as they were beyond earshot Mr. Wilson began discourse as to what would bring 'Lisbeth out of danger, and graft her firmly to a branch of church stock, to the neglect of a stately young alien vine, which displayed

such alarming inclination toward climbing over sectarian walls. Mr. Wilson, having a hard kind of philosophy accepted by a wilful sort of men, said, —

“It’s no use beatin’ round the bush, better settle it once for all;” but his minister, kind and manly, insisted against coercion.

“I am opposed to immediate marriage, Mr. Wilson, and also to positively commanding such a contract with Mr. Harmon. Leave her free.”

“But I’ve give my word to Phil.”

“What!” He drew the horse up sharply, and observed the speaker severely, then started again, saying, —

“You did not so inform me. Does even Elizabeth fully comprehend? Have you been plain with her?”

“Yes; that is, she understands well ’nuff.”

Mr. Ward’s countenance did not soften, for he felt the exact truth. Evidently neither man had spoken to the girl; nor had Harmon paid her any loving tribute of unselfish attention to win her favor. He asked the proud girl of her father, yes, demanded her life, without one token of tenderness towards herself. It was as if she belonged to those two self-willed men, like the horses in their stalls, and the lambs of their folds.

All the fatherhood of his loving heart went out to that defrauded child. The law demanded obedience of her; yet he saw how warped and twisted and

unnatural such authority became, wrenched from its gracious design.

Had he consulted his heart as to which of those young men should be intrusted with 'Lisbeth, he would have replied, "God can keep his elect anywhere; for love and truth's sake let John Mayhew seek his own." He might not command contrary to law, but he might and would see its intent unbroken; so he counselled in a tone which seemed more a command, —

"I will see Mr. Harmon, and inquire of him fully why he seeks your daughter in marriage; till then let the matter rest."

Here he drew the horse to a halt, and leaned forward, intently listening to a hymn, toned rich and clear, which cleft the air from the opposite winding hill, and provoked a faint echo from the deep woods.

"Who is that?" inquired he earnestly.

"The tenor singer."

"Who?"

"The circuit-rider."

"Ah, listen! The gift of song is a blessed one, and he is a man of extraordinary appearance and character, I am told."

"He never cuts up, an' looks like a 'postle, an' can argerfy like Jeremiah Smith; but he's the wust of the lot."

"Indeed! You have met him, then."

"Yes; 'Lisbeth an' me met him an' John fust time he

travelled our way, an' ever sence he's been racin' up an' down, cuttin' 'cross lots from the turnpike to county road, one way or t'other, twice a month; an' he allus stops by the wall or barn, or wheresomever I happen to be. Jest stops to arger, and sticks to it like a good feller."

"Indeed!"

The hymn was coming so near, some words could be dimly heard,—one of Charles Wesley's triumphant songs:—

"More than conquerors at last,
Here they find their trials o'er.
They have all their sorrows past,
Hunger now and thirst no more.
No excessive heat they feel
From the sun's directer ray;
In a milder clime they dwell,
Region of eternal day."

As the song slowly died along the echoing slopes, the minstrel came into view round a curve at the top of the first steep pitch of the hill. The rein was tightly drawn along the neck of the iron-gray, who stepped cautiously over rolling stones and rough ledge, between rows of bird-cherry trees, red, and bending 'neath their weight of fruit. He trotted sedately over the short level and merry brook, and the three travellers met. Truly, it was a difficult case for Mr. Wilson; but he introduced them. The greeting was quiet, as became gentlemen; then they searched each other's faces, but the

noble manliness of each prevented awkwardness. They might have been fellow-knights from Palestine, so regnant were they; or stern and resolute mortal foes, yet entirely blameless, and full of loyalty to truth. Faith inspired the visage of each. At length the new-comer tranquilly spoke, —

“Brother Ward, you are not really a stranger to me.”

“Ah!”

“A young man whom I highly value has made your name familiar; for you are, in fact, his pastor, and certainly possess his high esteem.”

“Indeed! He has done me good service, and I am debtor to him. Who is he?”

“John Mayhew, than whom I know none worthier.”

“You judge him correctly, I esteem him.”

Even as those steadfast men viewed one another so keenly, a mutual respect was born in them which lasted while both lived.

Mr. Wilson did not lack courage, and could not allow those approving remarks to pass uncorrected.

“He is rash an’ headstrong, after the manner of high-headed an’ forrard youth.”

“But I account him self-governed and restrained,” replied Father Benson.

Mr. Ward turned the conversation to irregularities which had occurred during Mr. Benson’s last meeting.

“Mr. Benson, allow me to apologize for the heedless behavior shown toward you by some younger mem-

bers of my congregation. You cannot be more deeply grieved by it than I am."

"Do not be disturbed on my account."

"I think there will be no further offence."

"Our ministers suffer indignities, and must. In this case the young men were simply thoughtless."

"You are not native to this State?"

"No; I am from Reading."

"An old orthodox town. Strange that one of alien faith should come from her!"

"Whether the belief I now hold be alien or no, I will not declare; but I am a living witness to the power of Reading orthodoxy."

"Will you tell me how?"

"Certainly. I was brought up in the strictest doctrine of Calvin, and studied Wesley that I might meet the new sect by reasoning. Somehow the novel teaching laid hold of my judgment, and I became an object of blame at home. My unhappiness became so great that I finally concluded if salvation was in a creed, rather than the Bible, nothing could be real. Still I persecuted the new sect as some satisfaction for lost hope, till I met Edward Taylor, who led me to unclouded faith. With prayer and fasting have I come so far."

"And have arrived at truth?"

"Perfect truth is the essence of God's character; no man has attained to it," replied Mr. Benson.

"May I ask a few questions?"

"As many as you please."

"Thank you. Were those things our fathers accomplished the results of error? You know the story of their advent into a country full of wild beasts and wilder men, having a severer climate than they had ever known. Some power upheld them. Was it the evil one? Is this goodly fruitage of soil, these flocks and herds, the harvest of false planting? In the teeth of every spoiler laying wait to destroy, has that weak remnant become thousands, and tens of thousands, filled hillside and level with a happy, prosperous, self-centred, and self-governed race, by believing a lie?"

Calmly the circuit-rider replied, —

"Absolute reliance on God, and belief that he called them and went before them, is the only reasonable answer to a thinking soul. We are all debtors here, immeasurably so."

"Now, Mr. Benson, I cannot but conclude that there is mysterious blindness in leaving our illustrious heritage of churchly and civil splendor for a stranger calling itself a church; and if it be, it is a lesser, fading light."

"So far as proper pride in clerical achievement is concerned, none excel me. It is my honest and adoring thought that God made the Pilgrims the chosen instruments of his purpose, and abides beside their sacred places."

"Why, then, do you offer incense at gentile shrines?"

"In all the earth the altars of the Most High are one. Creeds are neither shrines nor sacred perfume. At their best they only embody human thought, and sometimes are made the vehicle of arbitrary, unholy power. Had the Puritan kept to the advice of the pious and learned John Robinson, we should be in no difficulty."

"You cannot say he was free from creed; he was our schoolmaster as a doctrine."

"Yet he freed me from the bondage of it."

"How is it possible?"

"By perusing his farewell sermon to those of his flock embarking for America. This he said,—

"I charge you before God and his blessed angels, that you follow me no farther than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If God reveal anything to you by any instrument of his, be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry; for I am verily persuaded, I am very confident, the Lord has more truth yet to break out of his holy word. . . . For it is not possible the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick antichristian darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once."

"Must you not believe John Robinson contemplated further light should break upon this chosen people?"

"It seems impossible," said Mr. Ward, "that he

who made and tempered them to such triumphant uses should withdraw from them, and give his favor to another. Your sect claims that we make absolute dominion alone the type of Deity. Surely he who rides on the wings of the wind, who sets the movement of the stars, who made this wondrous frame of man, must possess resistless power."

"Ah, yes; but his Fatherhood equals his might, Brother Ward. When I am told God smites without pity, and elects whom he will destroy, I withstand the blow; but when I read, God so loved the world that he gave his Son, that whoever believeth in him should not perish, it is another thing. I adore his glory and dominion, I magnify his wisdom, but all my soul goes out to him who loves me."

"Do you then expect subversion of present teaching?"

"I confidently look for the overthrow of all creeds which elevate dogma above the teaching of Christ. It is given to none of woman born to warp one word of his. He calls us kindred; and this unity shall bind the earth to him at last. Dogma shall fail, its dominion cease, but the love of Christ our Lord shall establish a government whose increase and authority shall be 'from sea to sea, and from the rivers to the ends of the earth.'"

Mr. Ward grasped his hand as they silently rode apart, and in the exaltation of that hour Mr. Wilson was silent.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MORNING AFTER SINGING-SCHOOL

THE Monday after Mr. Ward's pastoral visit, Tom Wilson took the ponderous key which the district kept in Mr. Wilson's custody, and ran up the hill to open the door of the schoolhouse; but he slowed a trifle when he caught sight of the solemn structure, forty feet square, for it seemed a bit pokerish to think of entering it alone.

Its sides were covered with very thick matched boards, black, patched with moss and broken by windows high up towards the eaves, hidden by plank shutters.

A plank door hinged on a corner post; and a great squat chimney perched astride the ridgepole had occasionally dropped a brick upon the roof, until the chimney was ragged, and the shaven shingles rotted to leaking by its fragments.

Tom caught his breath when the groaning door turned miserably back on its rusty hinges into the dark, unventilated entry. He had heard that ghosts revelled in such haunts, and black cats rushed spitting and scratching from similar places.

He was in a mild state of shiver and goose-flesh

so delightful to a plucky boy ; but he whistled "Yankee Doodle," and marched into the darkened, musty schoolroom, jumped upon a bench, threw up a window, and unhasped a blind, then another, and a third ; but he shrieked when the southern blind swung heavily back, for a couple of winged creatures flew almost from within his hand. However, they proved to be enormous bats, which struck blindly about, and then flapped up into the shadows of the drooping eaves.

He ran down the descending aisle which separated the girls' benches from those of the boys,' crossed the floor, and standing on the entry door-sill looked back to a narrow front seat ten feet away, where the A-B-C class was accustomed to dangle its numb little feet and twist itself into all manner of shapes.

From there, desks and floor rose gradually to the south wall.

There was but one aisle, which divided the benches in half ; and of course one end of the tiers of seats touched the wall.

The master's desk, ample and high enough to seat unruly boys under, filled the eastern end of the floor, except two spaces, one separating it from the low seat, and the other from the girls' shelves, which were built into the north side, and occupied the space to the great fireplace. They were constructed for the girls' cloaks and hoods ; but the upper shelf had long been given up

to spare books, inkstands, everybody's dinner-pail, and whatever indefinite gear the master held in pawn for good behavior. An immense chimney and fireplace, with a brick hearth which ran halfway across the floor, wedged itself in close between shelves and door.

The smoky west wall was constructed of matched boards, whereon singing or school master might demonstrate, if he could find space between crevices of dovetailed edges sufficient to put staff or sum. Along a crack betwixt two planks the worn flooring plainly showed where cowhide boots had "toed the mark."

Gauzy filaments, airy cobwebs, hung from ceiling to floor, and thrilled him by a recurrent sense of hobgoblins.

"Timenation!" he yelled, driving his hands into his pockets and facing the door, as he heard dry chips crunching beneath rapid footsteps.

"Oh, you ain't scart ever, be ye?" laughed Dorothy, running in. "Ugh! isn't it cobwebby and musty? Come along; breakfast's ready," and they went out over the hill in a flash.

By nine o'clock women came bringing wooden piggins of soft lye-soap and fine sand in pewter porringers, and swept, scoured, and dusted, till Lettice declared the place clean, "if ever anything was."

Besides lighting a fire and bringing water, boys raked the dooryard clean, brought in wood and kindlings for

singing-school, oiled the hinges of the doors, and teased the girls.

The boys waited for the fire to die out after the task was completed, amusing themselves with games of tag, and running matches; but the women soon repaired to Mr. Wilson's for a cup of tea, which Jack told them was drawing for their refreshment, and also for a little restful gossip.

Singing-school evening ended a September day such as became a ripened season.

The sun was throwing his last bright bolts of light from behind the southern spur of Sugarloaf, and cool purple clouds, banded with yellow and streaked with red, lay reflected deep in the pond's blue water, when Lavina Smith and her brother Ben ran down the steep side hill, reddening with early autumn dyes, and cut into the forest.

Emerging, Ben ran up the ridge, while Lavina hastened to Mr. Wilson's, took the big key, and sprang along the level and up hill, her bright cloak flying out like brilliant wings.

"Hello!" called Ben by the schoolhouse door; "come along quick. I've stripped off birch bark to light the fire."

They kindled a fire quickly; then Ben pulled two iron candlesticks from his pockets, and Lavina laid some candles beside them on the teacher's desk.

Ben put a candle into a stick, took the tongs, and

broke a live coal from a crumbling brand, blew upon it till tongues of flame darted out, by which he lighted his candle, just as Tom and Jack came in bringing extra chairs.

Outside, cheery "How d'ye do's" and "How be ye's" of those on foot, and those who jogged up on horseback, preluded the entrance of various groups.

Soon Mr. Mason threw himself from his saddle. Jack rode the animal down to his father's barn, and the singing-master went briskly in; shook hands with acquaintances, and bowed to those unknown. He wore homespun trousers, blue broadcloth coat and waistcoat, buttoned with brass buttons, and high black silk stock.

As early as 1807 the Plymouth Musical Society was incorporated, electing Rev. Nathan Ward president. Those valleys and hamlets were the home of song.

Mr. Mason was born to it; he loved harmony, and loved to teach it. His equipment was a singing-book, pointer, chalk, and tuning-fork. He wasted no time in compliments, though polite and amiable.

"We are very much pleased to have so many friends come to see us start off," said he. "Mr. Wilson, will you take a seat in the desk, and I guess there's room for three or four more. Mrs. Lane, will you and these other ladies sit in the chairs? I want the singers as near me as possible, so there will be plenty of spare room on the back seat. Now school will come to order right away; we must make all we can out of this and

every evening, for our thirty lessons will soon be gone. Take first seat of the tribble, Miss Wilson."

The school scrambled into place, Huldah sighing as she went to the head of the altos solemnly and deliberately, as a foreordained right.

"We'll have a sing before recess, and warm up a little. Turn to the first piece, 'Old Hundred,' 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow.' Sing slowly, about this time. Follow the stick."

At such a moment an accident would naturally happen to Tom Wilson, and it did; just as the expectant silence was to be broken by the first chords, when every hand was marking time, every eye on the pointer, every form erect and stiff as buckram, rap-ap-ap-ap went something, striking bench and seat, bumping along down onto the floor. Tom had forgotten his candlestick, so stuck his candle carelessly to the desk. It toppled over, and rolled off.

The tense nerves relaxed, attention straying to Tom, who, being near the wall, pulled himself upon the seat; and those who occupied it hitched forward, and bent over, giving him room to pass and repass behind them. He recovered his straying property rather awkwardly, yet betraying a keen sense of humor. The master said composedly, as seemed meet for one living on the verge of casualties, —

"Put the end of your candle over Ben's light till the tallow melts. There! now hold it down on your desk till

it cools. That's it. We're ready again; let me see every hand marking time, one — two — three — four."

Watching the steady beat, he sharply bit his tuning-fork, put it to his ear, and gave the pitch, — "do — me — sol — do; sol — me — do," each part taking its own note, clear and true. "Sing!" The healthy young voices struck those mighty chords lovingly, if crudely, and poured forth the adoring strains with the spirit, and much understanding.

"That was well sung. Now 'Antioch;' give those high notes full and firm, Miss Wilson."

So they sang through wailing "China," "St. Martin's," and kindred hymns; after recess changing to lessons on the "board," and that most trying exercise of all, "sounding" voices. After he had drilled them in staff, bars, clefs, keys, rests, major scales and minor scales to his satisfaction, Mr. Mason gave out a tune, "Siloam," saying, —

"Sing it very gently; this is your time," marking a very moderate movement with his stick. They sang, and he turned an ear, and bent attentively toward the altos and trebles.

"Now the next verse, same time; sing!"

During the singing he accorded critical attention to tenors and basses.

"I hear a discord on this side; some new voices which don't keep the pitch. The tenors may sound alone; now, every one with me, do — me — sol — do. Yes, I see,

Tom Wilson don't quite hit it. Now the basses, if you please, do — me — sol — me — do. Ah, David King and Billy Batchelder are a little off. You three boys come out here; we'll see what we can do."

They blundered out behind the rows of pupils, and stood confusedly before him, tugging at their spencers, and wishing themselves in the bottom of the pond.

However, they wrestled manfully with the notes Mr. Mason took from his tuning-fork and passed to them. Sometimes their efforts ended in croaks marvellous enough to surprise their friends, then they giggled, and the whole school joined in chorus; again, their voices jumped clear over all bars, and they bit their lips and turned scarlet, while the school screamed with merri-ment. At last the master asked the pupils to help, and finally sent David and Billy to the altos, and Tom to the trebles, saying, —

"I am much obliged to you, scholars, for so kindly sounding with these boys. We have all been beginners, and we should always be helpers; the drill has been good for you as well as for them. They'll be able to help others after a while, for they're going to make first-rate singers. We have only time to sing a couple of pieces more. Turn to 'Ware.'" Nine o'clock came, and school closed promptly. The young men gathered by the outside door, awaiting sweethearts, half of them too bashful to offer an arm, or make an articulate sound when the equally coy maidens appeared.

That delicious kind of torture was especially imposed upon them that evening; because one's partner might be continued through the winter's festivities, or even for a lifetime. There was considerable anxiety outside, and not a little solicitude by the girl's shelves, as they put on their things. Personal interest was lessened, however, by observing John go home alone, and 'Lisbeth intently settle Dorothy's bonnet as she passed Phil's offered arm, nor answered his low, "May I see you home?"

He flushed and paled, but recovered himself in season to repeat the offer to Eunice, who laid her bare, chubby hand on his homespun sleeve, and gayly tripped away with him.

'Lisbeth rose next morning without thought of any reckoning for that she refused Phil's escort; so after breakfast, singing snatches of the last evening's music, she brought the great wool-wheel to the east room hearth, because a smouldering brand or two were necessary at early morning for drawing to a nice and even fineness the long threads of woollen yarn she was spinning.

Spinning wool was an enticing employment. Not all the laid work wrought by her on pale winter afternoons, with the sunlight in her hair, and glinting the fadeless crewels of her broidery, nor drawing in of beautifully dyed gloves and mittens with homemade hooks, by faint candles, that threw her face into such witchery of light

and shade as induced the boys to pause with sums half done upon their slates ; no work nor accomplishment female hands have ever touched was so becoming to her or to any of womankind as that.

She stood erect beside the wheel, which murmured or stormed according as it revolved slowly or rapidly, holding a wooden wheel-finger in her right hand, which rested on a spoke. A roll depended from the spindle-nib, and with her left hand she measured a length of it necessary to a thread, making five skeins to the pound, and pinched it at that point between the thumb and finger, turned the wheel moderately, while taking three backward steps and drawing the roll out to proper fineness, which being done, she twirled the wheel till its spokes seemed quivering gauze within its rim, and the woollen fibres were well twisted ; then she reversed it sufficiently to unwind the yarn from spindle-tip to head. Again moving the wheel forward, and advancing lightly with long step, she let the thread wind up, and balanced on one foot while she ran it down to the spindle-point, and once more slipped a few inches of roll between thumb and finger, caught it fast, and so continued spinning. She maintained a swift or leisurely movement all the time, every muscle in rhythmic play and even exercise.

Her supple person, completely poised, advanced, retreated, swayed, answering the urgent signals of the fleet limbs.

The right arm was now ahead, now behind, and again spiritedly described a circle; the left drew out, and guided the yarn with elegant sweep and curve. Spinning was the symmetrical conjunction of art, of gymnastics, and of labor.

Verily those daughters of the hills who wrought at spindle and loom often carried themselves after a stately fashion; and such classic mould of limb and figure as seldom poses before an artist sometimes loitered among canterbury-bells and hollyhocks.

So 'Lisbeth moved to the pastoral hum of the wheel that morning.

Near by, Mrs. Wilson banded a distaff, and Lettice tied corn-husks at intervals around skeins of double-and-twisted yarn, previous to throwing them into blue dye, to be colored for "clouded feetin'."

Dame Wilson knitted in a peremptory fashion. There was also an ominous shake of cap-border. Mr. Wilson had spoken confidentially to her that morning before he went afield, since when she had seemed much disturbed.

That girl of Thomas's, the resultant of her father's strength of purpose, unbent will, and her mother's loving kindness, was a sore puzzle. If she possessed unusual force, or inclined to guide herself, she was also compassionate and pacific. Neither the dame nor Mr. Wilson understood her, but they agreed she was "queer," and, further, that she must obey; therefore

a strong hand, in fact two of them, should immediately be laid upon her.

The difficulty was how to lay them on. She thought to begin carefully, and follow what lights appeared.

"Thomas seems kinder poorly this mornin', Marthy," she said.

"It is the sheep, I reckon."

"Sheep?"

"Yes; his and Slimpson's seem to be mixed up; and if the marks are dim he is likely to lose some."

"That Slimpson tribe is the poorest trash I ever see, or ever want to; but 'tain't sheep ails him."

Lettice perceived troublesome symptoms, and hurried to allay them.

"Pshaw, gran'ma'am! he was well tew breakfast."

"Meals is a poor place tew find trouble."

"'Pends some on what 'tis, an' who has it. When folks git kinder still, I feel for 'em; but when they stir up the house like a hasty pudden, it don't worry me none."

"I dunno, Lettice; but" —

"Well, I dew know. There's Gale lives under Sugar-loaf; he was awful cut up tew appearance when his wife died. Becky Peasley was workin' there, an' she tole me she never see nothin' tew beat it; an' she flashed 'round lively for a week or tew, till he kinder got over his sorrer; an' she said nobody would b'leve the sight of currant tarts, scalloped all round the aiges, jest as

his wife used tew fix 'em, an' jam an' hot biskit an' pies, it took tew pull him through. All the time he was bent and determined that he could'n' stan' it 'thout her; but, good land! he merriid agin in six months."

Lettice glanced queerly over her sharp nose before adding, —

"Merrid Becky herself; an' she tole Mis' Willard in my hearin', Becky did, says she (an' she was snivillin'), when he begun coaxin' she tole him no, stiddy, till she was rollin' out pie-crust in the butt'ry one day, an' he come in master onexpected, an says he, 'Becky, you wouldn't be so allfired hard on a feller if you knowed the fust time he thought of askin' ye was when you was makin' us comf't'ble the day Philena was buried;' an' she says, says she tew Mis' Willard, 'That fetched me;' and I sh'd thought 'twould."

"What you're sayin' hain't nothin' tew dew with Thomas's diffikilty."

"Rheumatics, — comin' fall so," persisted Lettice.

"No, it ain't."

"Well, if it ain't sheep nor rheumatics, I'm beat."

Mrs. Wilson sighed patiently, inquiring, —

"Has Thomas spoke of any trouble?" 'Lisbeth was spinning slowly, lest the hum should disturb her grandmother, and listened intently to hear the mystery of that overwrought cap-ruffle.

"Thomas got all flustered up tew singing-school."

"Flustered! Thomas! What at?"

"'Lisbeth."

"Me!"

"Yes, me," she answered mockingly, losing her temper. "What a plague ailed the strings of Dorothy's bunnit that you must fuss with 'em, seein' nothin' nor nobody from them cloak-shelves home, hey? Spitin' your father, as I never see one spited afore. You know what he's set on; an' knowin', left the Harmon boy stannin' there all cut up."

"Pool, grandma! he went home with Eunice."

"Did, did he? Queer, wa'n't it? What made him? Needn't tell *me*,—you're plannin' tew merry the May-hew upstart."

"Grandmother!"

"'Zactly what you're up tew. Takes a smarter gal'n you tew pull wool over my eyes."

"You speak," said Mrs. Wilson, "as if 'Lisbeth has no choice except one of these young men."

"We shall find she'll merry one of 'em, though there's chances plenty. Mr. Hight, poor man, left with six childern, an' needs her."

Lettice pulled her forehead, inquiring, —

"How ole is he?"

"Not very ole, I'm sure."

"'Bout sixty, I persoom. 'Lisbeth wouldn't make a becomin' relick."

"'Tend tew your yarn. As for this gal, she's one

thing laid out afore her, an' it's obedience 'cordin' tew Scriptor."

"Why, grandmother" —

"Not a word, 'Lisbeth, not a single syll'ble! You've gone to the end of your rope, you ungrateful, disobedient gal; an' if I was your father you'd merry Philip or leave this house, one or t'other, an' that quick, tew."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Lettice.

"Don't think it'll be done, hey?"

"No; an' I know 'twon't. This house'd be a sweet, pooty sight 'thout her."

"You are saying too much, mother," added Mrs. Wilson, laying the distaff down dejectedly. Deep tones and frowning brows accentuated the bitterness of the reply to both women.

"Here you be, Lettice, advisin' an' teachin'. Where'd you come from? Do you remember? I sh'd think you'd feel boun' tew us."

"Yes; I am boun' all the time, day an' night, fair weather an' foul, tew jest them tew, 'till death us do part,'" said the quivering voice, using those sacred words because she knew none else so binding, and raising her plain face, transfigured by the love-light shining there, toward the woman and child.

"Much ableeged," ironically. "Pleased tew hear how 'tis; but you understan' that gal merries Phil Harmon or leaves. As tew you, Marthy, you spared

the rod, an' there's your child, 'cordin' tew promise. I tole Thomas time an' agin 'fore he brought you here that you hadn't the spunk of a goose, an' —

"Say no more to my mother," really commanded 'Lisbeth, holding the trembling woman to her strong young heart; and sheltered there, girlhood returned to Martha Wilson as a dream. She remembered the gentle faith brought to that house, and how the husband had gradually gone from her to the arbitrary mother, until to herself she seemed simply the half-forgotten supplement to a domineering man, who demanded all, giving nothing; but ripening years were surely bringing return. Such defrauded souls find consolation somewhere in the recompensing years of God. Severity had driven the children to her loving heart, and they rejoiced in her as the exceeding joy of their lives.

She was that supreme and blessed woman, — a mother beloved, and the defiant old will could not harm her any more; still a palsying fear concerning the girl smote her heart.

The old lady, dumb for a moment with choking rage, finally stormed out, —

"The Bible says ole folks air for counsel, but stiddy of that they're slighted an' put upon an' flung at. Have you tended tew what I'm sayin', 'Lisbeth?"

"I have heard it all."

"What air you goin' tew dew about it?"

"Nothing. I am very sorry, grandmother."

The old lady eyed her disdainfully, saying, —

“Looks like it, with your set, frownin' face; but one thing can be depended on, you will merry Phil or leave this house.”

“What dumb foolishness!” exclaimed the maid.

“Lettice!”

“Yes, ma'am, that's what I said, an' stan' tew it. The idee! Lor' a massy, there's the King!”

CHAPTER XIV

DAME WILSON AND A VISIT

THE King entered with a smile that seemed a mixture of anger and drollery, saying, —

“Good-mornin', Mis' Wilson, an' gran'ma'am, an' the rest. Come 'long, pups. Watch, you lay down; an' you, Spring, git under the table. We've had a tormented hard run, the dogs an' me, since afore sun-up. A fox picked off one of Nabby's chickens. We've follered over logs and slippery stones. He crossed the brook more'n twenty times, but his pelt's out on your wood-pile.”

“'Lisbeth, give Mr. King a bite,” said Mrs. Wilson, seeing an opportunity to send her out, as the King

dropped on a convenient table corner, and mopped his forehead with a red bandanna. He went right to the question. "Don't want nothin', Mis' Wilson; but Jupiter 'Gustus, gran'ma'am! you ort tew heerd em sing last night. They did give 'Ole Hundered' an' them other tunes a hist. Some pesky good fun arterwards. One boy got mistook."

"We sha'n't prob'ly have tew go naborin' 'bout it," said the old lady tartly.

"Not naborin'? course not — here, pups, lay down. What ails them dogs? Come out an' set up if you feel better. Tain't naborin'; David King never hated himself for dewin' that.

"Phil is cousin tew our house, an' he's a good feller, Phil is; make Eunice a real good man. We don't want no foreordination spilt by upsettin' that dish. I dew hope nobody will be sech a dumb fool as tew run plumb agin the decrees 'bout them." He gave one of the dogs a push with the toe of his boot, finishing his speech by saying, "Go 'long out if you want tew."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the old lady, pushing her glasses up into the raving border of her cap.

"Didn't you, now? Course I heerd as I come in; but you're awfully mistook. Take a pinch of snuff — good — maccaboy. Things is puzzlin' once in a while; but I was studyin' this mornin' runnin' up by them big pines where the birches grow, an' I says tew myself, says I, 'That's the way things air fixed if folks'll on'y

let 'em alone. Them wavin' birches grow best on the warm side of them great pines as hold up their arms agin the nor'-easters; there they live longest, an' the bark is smoothest; ' an', gran'ma'am, I says tew myself, though mebbe you won't b'leve it, I says, ' 'Lisbeth's that very birch, an' John's that livehearted pine.' Yes, ma'am, I did."

"Why, David King! Why, David King!"

It was all she could say, being so shaken by his continuance of conversation to which he came accidentally and should not have noticed. Verily he was a law to himself.

"Yes, ma'am, an' his character is jest as wholesome as the balsam of them trees."

"Character! good deal you know about it, never larnin' even the catechism."

"No, ma'am, I never did, that's a fac'; prob'ly 'twouldn't dew me no good on this pint."

"Sartin, if you follered it; for it's a book writ by men as knew the hidden meanin's of Scriptor, an' set 'em afore us for lights."

"Hid things is all-fired hard tew find out, as I've seen this mornin', Mis'. Wilson."

"Why, David King, I'm s'prised" —

"I don't want tew say a single word agin your lights, — wouldn't for the world, — but if you set 'em up agin gospel, fussin' an' tinkerin' tew suit this an' that, it's like holdin' up a Jack-a-lantern in a foggy night, or

mistakin' a piece of punk for a warmin' fire. You remember them beaver-dams what us't tew be over tew West Plymouth? Nothin' but an alder bog fust; good for snakes, that's all. Well, them little beavers dammed the brook, an' kep' it under water till all the trees an' things from Hoyt Hill way back was drowned out an' rotted, long of all the stuff as washed down intew it, an' made a rich bottom. I've seen more'n twenty beaver houses stickin' out on't, like haycocks in a field; but bime by a man, Blodgett, I guess 'twas, come along an' settled there, an' when he needed more lan' he ups an' cuts the dam. Away swum the little critters tew a safe place, leavin' all that good medder-lan'. It spilt the colony, but made room for folks. You orter heerd the trappers swear; but nobody can't mostly tell what's best if he's sot agin it."

'Lisbeth came back, bringing a plate of luncheon, at the same time as girlish laughter announced the arrival of Lavina Smith and Mary King, who pushed back their bonnets and entered sunshiny and wholesome, giving a pleasant good-morning.

"Where to, Mary?" inquired her father.

"We are goin' to visit Ruth; an', Mis'. Wilson, we called for 'Lisbeth. Can you spare her?"

Mrs. Wilson was much confused, but dimly saw the request was very opportune, and managed to reply, brokenly, —

"Well, I'm sure — certainly — if she wants to go."

"An' take your sampler," said Lavina; "I want to learn a stitch."

Mr. King followed the three girls out, and started home. Soon they were up the hill, and followed the winding, sloping road, fringed by goldenrod, to the bridge of a small brook, and across it to where a narrow grass-bordered path, having stone steps at intervals in its ascent, ran up to a low, brown house, with one door midway its boarded side, and one window to right and left of it. It was closed; but Mary pulled a leather latchstring, without knocking, and they entered, certain of welcome, and happy to be there. The widow and Ruth were happier still.

"Laviny and Mary and 'Lisbeth, true's I live!" exclaimed Mrs. Willard. "Ruth," she called, "come here. Now you have come tew spend the day, I know."

"We came to if you ain't too busy; or goin' anywhere," answered Lavina.

"We ain't goin' away, an' I ruther see these faces than go tew a quiltin'. I'm busy weavin'; allus am. I must keep at it till dinner, then I'll put on a clean cap 'n apun an' set down. Ruth, take their things, an' give them some chairs—them big ones with quishions in 'em;" and they were accordingly seated on cushion-covers of bright full cloth and camlet patchwork.

"I am glad you brought knitting, Mary; that is my work too," said sweet Ruth. Every time the widow changed spools she asked questions.

‘Seen anything of the Fields lately? I’m allus scairt tew ask after ’em, Laviny.’

“Why, Aunt Betsey, grandna says old Mis’ Field was a witch — did awful queer things.”

“Well, Laviny, ’cordin’ tew the best lights the witching came outer the cider berrill, an’ possessed the ole man of all. Them that likes witch stories can stick tew ’em, but common sense is wuth a sight more. How many tansy cheeses has your mother made?”

“Ten; an’ I made two alone, every bit.”

“That’ll be encouragin’ tew the folks under Kidder Hill;” which remark brought the swift color to her cheeks, for Levi Lane went home with her from singing-school. “What say, Mary, can’t tell much ’bout your father’s crop?”

“Pa says our corn is mostly fodder corn. He’s goin’ to sell pelts an’ things to make it up.”

“Cert’in, cert’in. I b’leve your father’s livin’ comes outen the woods an’ water, more’n outen the ground an’ hoein’; but, law! the livin’ comes. That is a nice check, ’Lisbeth. Your mother an’ Lettice air masterhands at spinnin’ an’ weavin’ fine stuff;” and so along at intervals the loom paused for laugh and gossip. All at once the clatter ceased in the middle of a spool.

“Why, Ruth, dew go an’ see the time!”

She went into the little bare studded entry, leaned over the window-ledge, observed where the sun slanted across some lines drawn upon it, and announced, —

"It is most half-past ten."

"Put the smallest kittle on the fire, 'an' one for p'taters."

"Yes'm," she answered, and took the kettles from a clean board shelf, low under the small bench that stood beneath the window, partly filled them with water, and hung over the fire.

"Throw a good maple stick under," said her mother; "an' take the peck basket an' go up intew the garden next tew the barn. You'll find a few late cranberry beans tangled in them weeds; I left 'em for late shellin'."

"Yes'm."

"Carry the hoe tew dig a hill of p'taters coming back."

"Yes'm;" then facing the company, Ruth asked, "Would you like to go?"

"Oh, yes," and "Yes," and "Yes." So out they walked, unbonneted, into the garden, plucking handfuls of marigolds on the way. Ruth pulled the ripe potato vines straightly, shook the hanging potatoes off as orderly as a skilful boy would do.

When it was time, two moved the Bible and Mrs. Willard's "specs" from the table, drew it out, and laid it with blue china. Two danced with the waterpail down where the rocky bank juttet over, and dense maples shaded a clear, deep pool, and thrust the pail down into it. A trout, longer than

'Lisbeth's hand, darted from under as they drew the pail out.

A painter could scarcely find a lovelier subject than that one after dinner, so natural, so full of life, when Mrs. Willard joined them, clad in fresh cap and dress, and wearing a black kerchief smoothly folded across her breast, as she and the four young girls sat in the centre of that great square room on a spotless white floor, bare joists around, and bare beams overhead.

At one side the tall red dresser, at another the loom. Knots of red, green, gray, blue, and white yarn hung from pegs driven into the studding. They were mixed with reels, wheel-heads, and reeds.

There was spirit and life in the picture, contributed by the temper and fun of Lavina, the mezzo of Mary, the touch of superior grace and strength in 'Lisbeth, and the beaming hospitality of Mrs. Willard and Ruth, all springing, as grass grows and flowers bloom, from nature's truth. After a while Mary remarked, —

“We are comin' to huskin' in two weeks, Aunt Betsey.”

“Be you?” she asked, her lips aquiver; for though it was the continuance of a yearly custom, yet it was ever new.

“Yes,” said Lavina; “an' goin' to have fun an' fun. Our corn will be husked an' carried up-stairs in sixty minutes; an' after supper it's blindman's buff, button-

button, hide-and-seek out of doors, — the harvest moon fulls then, — an' oh, everything."

It was so year by year; as the farmers around gathered their crops and dressed their meat, they carried a part to her. Their corn fattened her pig in its field sty; their hay filled her log barn, and kept her cow; part of all they raised was hers.

She and Ruth blessed the neighborhood with their beautiful lives, and it made return from its material fulness.

At no other time than this husking did the vicinage appear bodily; but on a fixed day each autumn small wagon-loads of unhusked corn arrived, attended by families bringing also a substantial supper, and, as Lavina said, fun.

They drifted to other themes; and the long afternoon sped rapidly with maidenly story, laughter, and harmless gossip, till the three girls went home in the sunlit eve, themselves the rosier and the fairest objects of that peaceful scene.

CHAPTER XV

ALONG BY THE POND

MRS. LANE and John came out of the schoolhouse just in season to see Phil's proffer of escort, its refusal, and Mr. Wilson's scowl at the incident. He could not

see 'Lisbeth; but he could make a little diversion in his own life, so when they reached home he said, —

“Aunt Nancy, I guess I'll throw Brownie's saddle on and trot over to Alexandria camp-meeting to-morrow.”

Brownie was a freedom gift from his aunt and uncle, a pretty bay horse, which followed him like a dog, and on whose back he cantered over the hills whenever he had a spare hour.

“Well, now I would, John,” she replied. “Loizy and I will fix up a nice bite for your nooning, nutcakes and so on; I would go if I was you.”

He went down the road at early morning while yet a breath of the north underlay the balmy atmosphere. A soft light serenely covered the landscape, and the east was purple and golden with gorgeous sunrise tones.

Nothing but the dog and Mr. Tyrrell at the big farmhouse, only geese flapping and squawking by the watering-trough at the Kings', and the morning song of birds broke the general repose as he rode along till he was over the brow of Brainard Hill, steep and pebbly to its last curve into the turnpike, along which, beside the pond, a few early teams were lumbering at long intervals.

In an angle between the pike and hill road stood an old black smithy, its enormous iron-clamped blinds thrown clear back, opening half the gable end. Within, the bellows wheezed, the flames darted and writhed, the sparks flew, and the great smith, six feet four inches

high, loomed beside the fiery anvil, swung his corded arms, bare to the shoulders, lifting a ponderous hammer above his head, and bringing it down on a clanking white-hot staple.

The shop yard was littered with broken wheels, tires, axles, yokes, bars, and so on, among which a pair of oxen dreamily chewed their cuds, while their owner sat on a cart-tongue eating apples, and firing expletives, such as "Jee-hors-iphat, Mighty Spikes, Great Dagon!" at the unheeding Cyclops in his cave.

"Say, mister," said the stranger to John, who trotted up to leave a letter for the morning's stage, "say, is that the kind of critter raised in these parts? Buster, ain't he? Look at them arms, an' see my ring jump! I dew snum, I b'leve he'll pound it all tew flinders."

As he finished speaking, the blacksmith flung his hammer down as one tosses a plaything aside, fastened the ringbolt into the yoke, which he picked up with one hand, carried it outside, and laid it across a barrel of water, ring downward, to cool it, spoke a pleasant good-morning to John, took a sixpence for the work, then strode towards his house, which stood close by. The teamster kept his eye on the blacksmith, while John turned his horse toward the turnpike.

"By George! I was a good mind tew crawl up on my load this morning when the bellers boy fetched him out. I didn't know but he might fire an i'on bar at me for callin' him up so airly."

"He is one of the kindest and most peaceable men in the world," said John. "I hope your team will go along all right. Good-day."

"Good-day. I'm glad I see him."

John was halfway from Brainard's famous smithy to Hoyt's tavern when the great red six-horse stage from Haverhill thundered past him, heaving and swaying, snapping and cracking, through clouds of dust. The uneasy stack of trunks behind lurched and jerked at the straps. Small trunks and bandboxes upon the stage jumped toward the sides and into the centre; what kept them on no mortal could make out, unless each piece of baggage at the start made definite contract with the driver to be found in its lot and place at the journey's end, and, like the men and women of that country, kept its word as if it were a bond.

The horses pricked up their ears, stretched their traces, and fixed their eyes on the familiar tavern barn, for them a veritable wicket-gate where their burdens would fall off; and passengers limbered their stiffened joints, preparing to unload at Hoyt's, where they would breakfast and change horses.

A little farther along the old signboard squeaked a piercing welcome as Marden lifted the stage-horn from beside the driver's seat, and woke the echoes with its clear and happy call.

It was a merry good-morning, and rugged heights returned the hail, while, answering from westward, the

woody Point sent half a mile across Newfound's softly lapping waters a whispered benison upon him who through the moonless watches of the night had brought his precious freight of life in safety.

Riding by the tavern, John saw the travellers dismounting with pleasant good-mornings to the landlord. The Concord coach was already unloaded and out by the watering-trough being washed and its huge axles oiled for its northward journey.

After passing the inn, he rode slowly along by the pond, keeping its foot-road through an atmosphere fragrant with harvest scents.

Once in a while a fiery twig of sumach, or dash of clear vermilion on a maple leaf, heralded the coming splendor of shrub and tree. Here and there those brilliant bannerets disclosed how closely autumn had advanced her pickets, how near her gorgeous army pressed.

Birds had finished their matins, and, fresh from baths in pond and rivulet, pruned their feathers, then darted off, flaunting red caps or breasts, or yellow coats among sober black and gray. Beautiful blue gentian peeped from beside old logs, and snuggled in warm nooks at the foot of trees. Wild asters and goldenrod hung admiringly over the musical rills; red globes of dogwood lightened the forest below the tavern far into its depths. The trilling birds and beautiful quietude soothed young Mayhew; still he was forlorn enough, and unhappy.

After a while the restfulness of the pike was broken, and it became alive with teams of every description. Light ones flew along, heavy ones droned; but it made no difference to him: he felt alone, bereaved, unjustly dealt by, as though God himself were afar off, and heedless of him.

Troughs full of running water set at short distances from one another, being filled from mossy spouts, which brought to them the outflow of ledge-hidden springs. Men caught the water in pewter mugs, or cups made of large leaves, held under the spout-stream; horses and cattle thrust their noses deep into the tanks.

At those refreshing stations men spoke freely together, inquired after each other's health, pursuit, destination; and, according to the custom of Yankees, they thriftily swapped all manner of gear, from jack-knives to horses, as they could "light on chaps," or traded from one load to another.

All people journeying along the road greeted as they passed or met, saying at least, "Good-morning, sir," or "A pleasant day, sir." He who did not do so was deemed a churl, no matter what his style or equipage. While Brownie drank at a trough in the forest, where the water gurgled down from a steep hillside, a man on horseback galloped up. His dress showed his calling; for he was a circuit-rider, who glanced full at John as he reined his horse away, and seeing his troubled face saluted him thus, —

"The Lord be with thee, brother."

Mayhew courteously returned the salutation with a bow, but made no effort to ride along with him, though both were doubtless going to the same place. He loitered onward over the sandy, rolling pike to Bristol, and climbed a high hill leading from thence to the campground; so it was quite nine o'clock when he arrived at the entrance to the place of tabernacles, which was made by pulling down several lengths of fence. For rods each way from the rustic opening horses were hitched, saddles thrown down, and wagons drawn to the roadside. One wagon, on chain springs, lumbered along before him, its decorated sides divided into uneven red panels by narrowish stripes of brown. A tall white hat and a big calash appeared above the high-backed seat.

Three children, of ten years old and under, were stowed into the picturesque carriage in front, their tow-heads dancing in and out of sight as they jolted over rough places; and two large boys occupied the hind part, steadying themselves by its edge. Wide-brimmed straw hats covered their brown heads, long red wrists pulled out of their gray homemade sleeves. They were chewing spruce gum, and taking in every new thing their bright eyes fell upon.

Wagons were scattered through the woods wherever an owner had found sufficient room for one; and chaises, resembling enormous baby-carriages, had crept into lesser spaces.

Farther into the forest a large number of horses were tied, munching grain, and whisking their long tails at the persistent September flies.

There young Mayhew drew the saddle and bridle from his horse, tethered it to a strong sapling, scattered a bundle of fresh hay which he had bought of a vender, at its feet, then turned back into the wood-road, which ran some distance through the heavy growth of trees, ending at the centre of the camp-ground. There it branched, and ran in opposite curves before a crescent of tents.

Contented groups and pairs, clothed in Sunday dress and manners, strolled through those calm coverts, or threaded in and out among the dusky tree-trunks.

A little tow-headed girl carefully guided an aged grandsire towards the seats, among stones and roots, which his failing eyes could not discern.

Close by, a youthful couple sat upon a rock refreshing themselves after a long journey with doughnuts and baked sweet apples, and watched a child, who climbed over knotted roots and shared their meal.

One boy came along, then another and another, as the manner of boys is, till several gathered on mossy stones or rugged logs of fallen trees, while each one recounted how many woodchuck skins, caught by his prowess with dog or trap, skinned with his jack-knife, stretched and nailed to his father's barn with his bruised fingers, awaited the barter or cash trade of a

coming muster. A pretty girl leaned against a tree innocently aggravating a distressed, awkward young man who wished to be her true love, and, like his kind, made himself ridiculous, blushing and twisting his red hands in utter bewilderment.

Apart among the trees walked a pair of lovers hand in hand, a sweet picture. He was tall and sinewy, bearing an honest manliness and deferent courtesy toward the girl, goodly to see. His suit of homespun was new, and neatly fashioned.

Her trim figure was shorter by a head. Blue eyed and rosy fair she was in her pink bonnet and blue linen dress,—spun, woven, and colored, cut, basted, and made by its winsome wearer. She wore a string of gold beads around her neck, and the silk bag hanging from one firm arm was embroidered with beads by her grandmother.

All were hushed and orderly, feeling the presence of Him whom they came to worship, for they threaded aisles His own hand builded to the temple Himself had reared.

Slowly passing through the gently moving scene, he heard dreamlike melody from singing worshippers who were holding morning prayer-meetings in the tents. It quivered up through the trees with voices of shouting also, dulled into harmony by distance and muffling leaves, and high above all murmured a mellow wind in the tops of the trees,—a faint and far-off orchestra.

Nothing broke in upon the brooding peace, save the chirp of a robin, or whirr of olive-shaded crossbill flying to some late grainfield, or coo of glittering doves going to luncheon behind board kitchens, or beside the crotched sticks and wooden cranes where food was prepared in the rear of each white tent.

He leaned against a gray tree-trunk, and listened to sounds heard dimly from the little white village, scanned the throng pressing toward it, and enjoyed the charming dramas enacted by pretty groups around him, then stepped quite to the leaf-girt amphitheatre, where he paused and looked down its easy slope. It was clear of trees, except enough for shade, and filled partway with plank seats fronting a central object, the "speakers' stand." This was an oblong structure two stories high; the lower one closed and fitted up for preachers' dormitories, the second one open towards the camp, and used for a pulpit. A wooden bench ran its whole length of twenty feet. It was called the "preachers' seat;" and its roof sloped sufficiently to shed rain.

That building was central in a semicircle whose finished curve was formed on either hand by rows of small white tents, purchased by neighborhood contributions; and their inmates were the owners, augmented in number by one or two favorite ministers, or near friends, and numbering, all told, from six to three times that in each tent.

CHAPTER XVI

CAMP-MEETING

SHORT prayer and experience meetings preceeded the afternoon discourse preached by Father Benson to some young men who desired to enter the ministry; and as the last sound of the bell, fastened high up on a tree-trunk, and rung by the presiding elder, died away, he ascended the rickety stairs and moved slowly to his place midway the long bench. The last faint whisperings of the great audience were hushed before he opened services by reading one of John Wesley's battle hymns:—

“Arm me with thy whole armor, Lord;
Uphold my weakness with thy might;
Gird on my thigh thy conquering sword,
And shield me in the dreadful fight.”

During remaining introductory exercises he sat motionless, with folded hands, scanning the solicitous young men presented as candidates for the ministry.

His message was primarily to those solemn and awed persons who sat by themselves on the front bench; and after he slowly rose to deliver it, he paused before repeating the text, “Can ye be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” Another pause. He was plainly burdened by the weight of the tremendous chal-

lenge. Then, after the manner of one sent to demand response to an awful question, he repeated it, his voice swelling and ringing clear and dulcet to rear seats far up the slope. It struck the ears of stragglers leaning against birches beyond the outmost benches; it thrilled and quivered into the very souls of the listeners.

One must be instructed and prepared for such baptism, he told them; the Spirit was a constant instructor, revealing, endowing, supporting, else how could one endure such baptism? for what was it?

In the first place and ever it was one of service that brought strength to weakness, courage to the cowardly, hope to the despairing, songs to the desolate, cold water to His little ones, opened the King's gates to returning wanderers, and drew the outcast near, so his defiled hands could touch the hem of the Master's healing garments.

It was a baptism of temptation,—when honor and riches and lofty estate were offered for faith; when earthly love blinded one's sight to eternal truth and heavenly visions; when human affection failed, and friends forsook and fled; when the wine of life was drained to its lees by deceitful and alien lips.

It was one of poverty, when tilled field and flying loom refused their wealth, and of obedience when divine law traversed one's dearest hopes, and of bereavement when blossoms of promise were strewn dead at one's feet. Yet most difficult of all was the final baptism of love.

"Can ye," said he, "go with him down into those waters where love loses itself in blessing others? for so only can ye follow the Incarnate Love.

"Thus saith the Son of Mary, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

"O beloved, this is most trying,—this generous, forgiving spirit toward the erring, sinful, and grovelling; toward the bigoted, self-righteous, and unbelieving, and particularly in respect to those who stint and measure the abounding fulness of God's pitying favor, binding with cords of human dogma the free course of his saving grace, making the word of God of none effect by their tradition, while the world groans on, waiting for unity and Christly charity among them who bear his blessed name.

"Your Great Exemplar demands a life fashioned after his own, according to this perfect law. If so be that ye are buried with him in baptism, then must ye love every living soul even as himself loved you, not a whit less, but so, as far as humanity can copy the divine.

"Are ye equal to these things? Towards Magdalen and Pharisee can ye exemplify such exceeding love? Can ye sink into the wondrous sea of God's changeless grace, and rise unto his life?

“Can ye be buried in the whelming deeps wherein the unseemly idols of your souls are drowned? Can ye follow him down into the awful gulfs of misery, want, and despair, forgetful of self, so ye may bring the vilest leper of the race to the gracious Healer? Can ye walk meek and blameless through shame and contempt, and forgive deceiver and ingrate?

“Then, though he lead through the fire, its flame shall leave your souls white and heavenly tempered. Great floods shall lift up their voices on every side, and wrecking billows howl and roar all the angry night; but, lo! in the morning your spotless raiment shall shine as the light, and your feet, which were bruised and torn, shall lose their pitiful scars beneath the healing breath of that sacred air; for then shall ye be inhabitants of the blessed country where they never, never more say, ‘I am sick,’ where ‘there is no more death, neither sorrow, nor any crying.’”

No abstract of that hour's sublime ministry could faithfully record it. None could describe the stately diction of the exordium, nor the argument by which the vital truth of faith was upheld, nor the prophetic power of the peroration. One deemed he already trod with triumphant foot upon all opposing forces, and stood at the gateway of the skies, victor over himself, the world, and Satan.

Bunches of southernwood fell from loosened fingers, and late asters dropped from unthinking maidens'

hands. Tears were falling from many eyes; on other faces a supreme peace had set its mystic seal.

On seats nearest the speaker's stand a number of men and women swayed from side to side, or knelt on the ground, clapping their hands in ecstasy and shouting, the women faintly, dreamily, the men, in part, making great noise and confusion.

When the sermon ended a few passed to and fro, speaking to one and another on whom the power had fallen.

One man paced up and down the central aisle, his lips moving without sound, gently smiting his palms meanwhile.

Two met in a clear space front of the benches, each gazed silently at his brother for a few seconds, then both burst into tears, threw their arms around each other's neck, and with a united shout of "glory" woke the slumbering echoes of the hill. One or two women were carried to a tent near by, and the presiding elder rose and read a hymn. He was tall and thin, well equipped mentally, and a man of much executive ability. The sermon had exalted him; still, he did not give, nor believed he could ever yield, assent to such stormy, and to his mind half mortifying exhibitions of religious fervor as he had witnessed.

In his soul was a blessed sense that he had risen on a mighty flood of assurance, yet there was no disposition to voice even the faintest amen. He wished

the clamor would cease, and a benignant silence come, stillness that might be felt, so that he might quietly take those truths to his soul; yet in him was no knowledge of denying to any the freedom of worship which he claimed as the right of rights to every one, no matter of what creed.

He was thankful when the hymn hushed the shouting, and for the quiet that rested over all during the consecration of the sacred elements, for the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper immediately followed.

During its progress, as he walked along between the rows of seats, breaking the consecrated bread to worshippers kneeling on the leaf-strown ground, suddenly a marble paleness came over his tired features, his frame trembled as if to falling, he paused and handed the blessed emblems to Father Benson, leaned against an oak trunk that grew close by, clasped his hands, and gazed intently upward. Every trace of weariness departed from that eager visage, and through its kindled whiteness shown an ardor so regnant, so imperative, as to awe scores of people who waited beside the altar.

No sound broke the heavenly composure of the campground, save the subdued foot-falls of God's ministers on their priestly errands, and no syllable parted those questioning lips; no sign flitted over that rapt countenance, nor did any token fall from those wondering eyes.

They, standing by, beheld, but could not decipher its glorious characters.

What mighty pageant moved before him in the sapphire depths of the arching sky none ever knew. What armies of the living God wheeled and circled in mid air, rank on rank, to the rhythm and beat of supernal music ; what heavenly battalions, marching with high assent to celestial orders, separated from the shining soldiery and flew to the rescue of sorely beleaguered camps, where footsore and discouraged armies of the church militant struck feebly at the foe ; what ensigns floated free and glittering white, save for the central blood-red cross ; what guidons led — of all those things he uttered no word.

Did he behold angelic messengers cleaving with lustrous wings the upper air and passing to and fro — these on downward pinion bent, swiftly responding to the cry of the suffering and desolate, making straight paths to the Great King's little ones of every land and tongue ; and those on upward wing returning from the four quarters of the earth, the light of the eternal sun flushing each joyous visage as they proclaimed the conquests of the cross, and the growing empire of eternal love ; or convoyed loyal souls, who through grace had conquered death, and whose adoring eyes looked for the first time on him who had loved them ?

Did he see behind them throng the great multitude "which no man can number," the church triumphant,

which is without spot before the throne ; or gaze on the saintly throng of those who had “ come up out of great tribulation, clad in garments of righteousness, white as no fuller on earth could whiten them ” ? Did he listen to supernal choirs, full chorussed, crying, “ Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever,” and the harpers, harping and singing “ as it were a new song before the throne ; ” or did he discern but one form and countenance, Him of Nazareth, his pitying, loving Lord.

To his dying day he never revealed ought concerning it to his dearest friend, or the wife of his faithful heart.

After some time the color returned to his face, his eyes fell, and he knelt until Father Benson spoke the words of dismissal, “ Go in peace ; ” then he rose and resumed his place, not indeed as if no strange thing had happened, but with great humility, an exalted tenderness of speech, and gracious deference that never left him to his life’s end.

When the long sacramental ceremony ended, the audience silently melted away, going either to tents or to prepare for long homeward journeys.

Many a time during service, Father Benson had glanced towards a tree just beyond the altar benches and the young man seated at its root. Thither he immediately made his way, and clasped John’s outstretched hand.

He perceived sure signals of conflict ; and after some

little while spent in discussing the events of the afternoon, he said, "Come with me." John accompanied the gray-haired man, whom the general voice of the circuit had named Father Benson, past tents around and in which groups of men talked over the peculiar happenings of the afternoon service, and women were laying the long board tables for supper, out behind the white tabernacles, by more women who were busy preparing the meal over fires kindled on the ground between two upright crotched sticks that held crane and pot-hooks; they went far into the woody depths beyond any noise of camp-ground or stray campers, and sat for a long time on a mossy stone, reasoning together.

Finally they parted, and John Mayhew passed from out the shadowy coolness, equipped his horse, threw himself into the saddle, and rode into the strong sunbeams, then level with his eyes. He drew his hat down, loosed the bridle-rein, and allowed the beautiful bay to take the road at its own gait, while he knit his forehead and bent his energy and conscience to the future. There was no dodging nor flinching about it. What was his should come at last, he told himself. How? That was not plain; but the fire on his hearthstone should be kindled by Thomas Wilson's daughter, or never rise therefrom. He could wait for her if he must, even till day was done.

To say he willingly came to that conclusion would be untrue. He bore a man's deep, silent pain, none the less

bitter because unvoiced, and he would have evaded it if he could.

For the present he must go away, and he would talk to Squire Baker about it as soon as he returned to the office. When he came to Brainard Hill, the old blacksmithy had lost every spark. He looked up the heights silvered by the setting moon, and turned his impatient horse up their rugged steeps. Shadows slanted long as his steed toiled upward; crickets chirruped strident salutes from the grass, and lonesome owls hooted and flapped away within the thick woods below the King's; but all of mankind seemed lost or gone, not even one of the King's dogs barked.

Two hours after 'Lisbeth returned from Widow Wilard's his horse clicked along the stony road by Mr. Wilson's; but its rider could not see through the darkness where she from her window discerned him as he passed and blessed him.

Mrs. Lane sat up for him, the teakettle singing near her, and made a pot of coffee when she heard the horse's hoofs upon the ledge. As she sipped a cup with him, while he recounted the notable events of the camp-meeting, she was glad to note the shadows were fled from his face.

CHAPTER XVII

MEETING BETWEEN THE KING AND SQUIRE

IN the glory of October the King sauntered up to his field-bars in a brown study. Evidently he shouldered his gun and whistled up the dogs that morning more to allay some fret than to hunt. Putting one foot on the middle rail, he made ready to spring, then stopped and gazed toward a flaming clump of scrub-oaks growing at a bend of the road above him. The dogs raised their noses from a mat of bright leaves, and thrust their ears forward, — all three were harking. Finally a tall white hat appeared in and out among the bushes, a horse came in sight, and carefully picked its way down the pebbly hillock.

The King completed his jump, twisted his quid, made a lazy nod, and settled back, gun in hand, against bar-post and wall.

“Good-morning, Mr. King.”

“Mornin’, Square Baker.”

“All well at your house?”

“Yes, sir. How be your folks?”

“Very well,” answered the squire, lifting a rein.

“Hold on,” said the hunter; “I reckon you was sorter sent, for I’ve been wantin’ tew see ye pretty bad.”

The King stopped, picked up the gun and sighted it, while inquiring, —

“How’s corn comin’ in your way?”

“Well.”

“’Taters?”

“An excellent crop.”

The squire presumed the hunter had trampled a neighbor’s cornfield, and was in trouble; but he was in a hurry, and again shook his bridle-rein. Quickly the King straightened his frame and poised upright by his gun. Noting the change, the squire kindly asked, —

“Are you in trouble with anybody?”

“No, I ain’t. ’Tain’t nothin’ ’bout me, anyways. It consarns them as b’longs to yerself. You’ve got tew stop this ere foolin’ of Phil Harmon’s.”

Squire Baker was perplexed, and half resentful. The King paced a step forward, and laid his hand on the bow of the saddle.

“See here, Square,” he said, “you think I’m per-soomin’. They say you can look a man clear through. Now sight me — stiddy. See a mean or sneakin’ spot?”

The old man’s lip quivered slightly during the inspection he invited.

“Now,” he said, “p’r’aps I’d better speak how ’tis ’tween us and ’Lisbeth. Ye see, our Lucy’d been ailin’ three weeks, — ’twas five year ago or sech a matter, — an’ one day the doctor says, says he, ‘Your gal is terrible sick, an’ you an’ Mis’ King are all wore out; send for

'Lisbeth.' I looked at mother, an' she tew me ; but the doctor spoke up agin. Says he, "'Lisbeth is 'sponsible 'nuff for a woman of fifty." So she come 'bout dusk ; then mother an' me we went in an' out, roun' an' roun' that bed till long past midnight.

"Bime by our little gal stopped moanin', an' grew white an' still. 'Lisbeth says tew us, so quiet an' pity-in', 'She's sleepin' ; an' the doctor said on'y I must stay if she slep'. You go out, an' I'll speak the minit she wakes up.' She follered us, an' pulled a shawl 'round mother tender like, put on a stick of wood, an' there we set one on each side of our fireplace, years an' years 'pears tew me, till finely, jest as the fust streak of day crep' behine them tree-tops yender, 'Lisbeth motioned us tew come ; an' our little gal reely knew us, an' slep' agin, an' I went out intew the barn. When the doctor come, he say, 'The chile is good fer seventy years fur's I know, but it's 'Lisbeth's care an' jedgment ;' them's the words he spoke, an' I went out intew the barn agin, an' "pulling off his old slouch hat, "I promised Him as is above us all, that long as I lived no sorrer should come tew 'Lisbeth if I could hender ; I'd stan' 'tween her an' it, an' I will — yes, sir, I will."

The squire took the hard hand from the saddle-bow in both of his.

"You'll help me, Square ?" then with strange authority he continued, "You've got tew help 'Lisbeth."

"I will try."

“Try? That won’t do, Square; say ye will.”

“I certainly will. Have you debated this matter with Mr. Wilson?”

“Yes, I have; we’ve had words back and forth — pretty sharp ones, tew.”

“Did he reply?”

“I reckon; tole me tew mind my own affairs.”

“And so you left it.”

“Not by a long shot! I telled him I was dewin’ so everlastin’ly, an’ sh’d keep right on up hill an’ down tendin’ tew it; an’ if the scent run through his fields or intew his dooryard ’twan’t my fault.”

“Thomas is a very set man.”

“I guess you’ve struck it; hit that nail on the head, I’ll be darned if you hain’t. Sot! yes, it’s sotness ails him mostly, an’ same thing with Phil.”

“But Mr. Wilson will not urge” —

“Now, Square, look here, he’s sot on it. Now, who’s goin’ tew give in? — anybody but ’Lisbeth?”

“But, Mr. King, he will yield if he proves to be wrong.”

“Prove that he, Thomas Wilson, is wrong — well, I guess so, specially when its ‘bout ’lection. I can’t track him. I’d ruther foller sheep-paths through roz-bry bushes. You’d better see, Square, if ’tain’t foreordinated she shall keep her word stid of her father his’n. You’ve promised.”

“I have.”

Up from the richly colored forest below them rose a song, —

“No foot of land do I possess,
No cottage in this wilderness
A poor, wayfaring man,
I dwell awhile in tents below,
And gladly wander to and fro,
Till I my Canaan gain.”

“Father Benson,” said the squire, plainly gratified at the prospect of meeting him.

“Yes, it’s him, the tenor singer as Mr. Wilson calls him; he won’t ’low he’s really a minister.”

As they spoke, the iron-gray emerged from the bright woods and cantered towards them. The King asked Father Benson to stop, but he could not; so the hunter left the two men, and was about plunging down the bank covered with checkerberry when he drew back exclaiming, —

“Why, ’Lisbeth, an’ little Dorothy tew. How be ye? They’ll be glad tew see ye,” jerking his thumb backward; “but I can’t stop a minit, for I hear a patrige drummin’.”

Their hands were full of mosses and medicinal roots. Both men greeted them kindly, and their uncle said, “Elizabeth” (he always called her by her full name), “tell your mother I shall be over Saturday, and carry you home for a few days.” The girls started homeward, while the gentlemen talked for some time before parting. When Father Benson overtook them he dis-

mounted, lifted Dorothy into the saddle, and walked bridle in hand to the Wilson house, his heart pained within him at the shadow falling over the girl who travelled beside him in such healthful glow of youth.

When the squire was carrying 'Lisbeth to the village on Saturday, he told her that Mr. Benson had found a place for John in Mr. Shaw's office in Boston, and that he would go early in November.

"I thought he was going to stay with you, uncle?"

The tremor of that strained voice nearly upset him, and he gave the horse such a vicious thwack as sent it cantering down poorhouse hill; then he kept a continuous talk and pulling at the reins till the astonished animal drew up at the squire's door.

Mrs. Baker knew what her husband intended to say while bringing 'Lisbeth out, so she spoke quietly, "Are you well, Elizabeth? Run right up to your room and take your things off. Lois will be in soon."

She went to a cosey, white-curtained chamber, and sank into a tall rocker, thankful to be out of sight and alone. Years after she remembered exactly how evenly the mats were sewed and braided, and how smoothly they were spread upon the yellow floor; how white was the tufted linen counterpane between the copperplate curtains of the high bed; how the mirror shone with its tiny brass sconces on either side; how burnished were the brass handles of bureau and washstand; how beautiful the lustral bowl and pitcher. She wept bitterly for a few moments, then bathed her face and descended.

Her aunt was busy at fall sewing, and a seamstress was helping her. The woman was called Mehitable Stone, or Hitty for short. She was a tall, spare, sharp-nosed spinster of uncertain age and certain opinions, who earned ninepence a day, enjoyed herself, and carried all the news from house to house with her reticule.

Mrs. Baker knew Hitty's failings and limitations. She also understood the village was interested in 'Lisbeth and her lover, and determined no tales should be carried away for magpies and tabbies to chatter and purr over. When 'Lisbeth came down she said, "Did you bring your work?"

"No; mother wished me to sew for you." Seeing 'Lisbeth composed, and hoping to prevent further mention of Mayhew, she said, "We are pretty much hurried by our own work; but your uncle thinks, and so do I, we ought to help Mrs. Lane with John's things — makes it bad he is going right in the midst of fall work so. Hitty, will you give 'Lisbeth something to do?"

"She better hem a piller-case whilst I put in a sleeve, 'fore cuttin' work."

"Well, you'll find a hank of fine boughten thread and some needles and wax in the sewing-table drawer, 'Lisbeth. Sit right down by the window."

Mrs. Baker went out, and the girl found herself with only a table between herself and the seamstress. Hitty squinted across several times; but the silence remained, except for a quick snapping of thread and regular tick-

tock, tick-tock of a corner clock ; but she thought to herself piecemeal, —

“ So this is Thomas Wilson’s daughter ; well-lookin’, that’s a fact. I do wonder if she cares for him. I’m goin’ tew see.” Then she spoke, —

“ Have you got the white wax ? My thread’s a little kinky.”

’Lisbeth passed the wax without comment, and pretty soon the woman questioned, “ Hain’t seen my thread, have ye ? ”

“ No, I have not.”

“ There ! here ’tis in my lap. I guess Mis’ Bakerses hurry flusters us all, don’t you ? ”

There was no reply, and she continued, “ What a streak ’tis in John, goin’ down below.”

All was silent except the old clock, and she demanded bluntly, —

“ Don’t you think it’s a queer prank ? ”

“ I never thought of it nor heard of it till this morn-
ing.”

“ Good land ! you don’t mean it ! I’ll bet it’ll be the ruination of him. I should hate to have him go like destruction if he belonged to me.”

The settled prediction of shipwreck fretted the girl, who answered pointedly, “ My uncle has faith in him.”

“ Yes ; faith in folks is his weak point ; but, as I was a-sayin’, won’t he make his hansum face an’ takin’ ways go for all they’re wuth. I s’pose he’ll be back one of

these days with a city gal tucked under his arm, a-min-cin' an' a-puckerin', all feathers an' furbelows, an' pokin' fun at us."

A Yankee hates a sneer. He is a born fighter; but his spirit is so high, and a sneer is so mean a weapon, he generally turns his back to it in contempt, and this characteristic attaches as well to women as to men. For one brief moment 'Lisbeth seemed to hear a derisive laugh from the mythical woman, and hated her and her lover, as well as the spinster who conjured up the picture. Then she blamed herself because of one distrustful feeling; but she bit a thread off savagely before remarking, —

"He wouldn't be seen bringing home such a woman to laugh at Mrs. Lane."

"We can't mostly — oh, my stars, 'Lisbeth Wilson, see this work! It's a perfect sight! I've put these sleeves in gusset to shoulder seam, an' felled 'em fine an' close."

Lois burst in upon them, pretty, sensible, impetuous, and warm-hearted. She was also auburn-haired and brown-eyed, her father's pet, and a skilled musician. Her emphatic speech began immediately, —

"You've come, 'Lisbeth — good. You look cross; don't she, boys?" She spoke to her two brothers, one older, one younger, than herself, who came in with her. "Well, you'll look crosser, black as ink, when I tell you what father expects us to do for muster."

“Harry and I can’t help,” broke in Dave. “He’s got to drill afternoons, and I shall have to help him fix his gun and cartridge-box and flints and things.”

“Of course; nobody but ’Lisbeth and I to do anything — dust and put things in order, and ransack the hill for partridge-vine and bleached brakes. Then father says we must learn a new song he’s got. Oh, dear, ’Lisbeth!”

Mrs. Baker entered, saying, “There, lay your sewing right down, and come to dinner.”

CHAPTER XVIII

MUSTER

ALL over the village people made stirring preparation for muster. Within doors the great ovens were scarcely cool for a week beforehand; and outside, dwarf asters and marigolds nodded and winked knowingly at each other across cleanly raked front yards.

Yellow floors fairly shone between braided mats, and windows were crystal clear; for out of them on training-day sweet-faced women would watch the militia marching to its rendezvous on the village street, or filing past in regimental order to the parade ground.

Great training, or muster, was the supreme event of

the year. It occupied an entire day, and was a wonderful time for patriotism, gingerbread, and Medford rum. It was a general muster of the people also, an annual gathering of all men and boys from towns represented by the soldiery. By the time haying and oat-harvesting were finished they began planning for "great training."

The habits of the people were so quiet and domestic, modes and means of travel were so slow and difficult, it was a matter of "town talk" for a man to go twenty-five miles from home; therefore, going to muster was a momentous journey, entered upon with forethought.

Each town had its saw-mill or tannery, taverns and village stores; but training-ground was the one general place for the meeting of friends.

The promiscuous multitude, together with tentholders, pedlers, and bakers, made novel and picturesque groupings in the field.

Many persons turned an honest penny by "keeping a tent," where they sold homemade food and drinks, and sometimes small articles of dress, — linen bosoms, mittens, and the like. The "tent" consisted of a few stakes driven down so as to form a square, with rough boards nailed against them to keep the crowd out, and flat ones atop for a counter.

Bakers' carts carried one commodity, just one, but toothsome, — baker's gingerbread, cooked in sheets about six inches long, three wide, and less than half an inch

thick. The crowd bought without stint, and always carried some home to women and girls.

The pedlers were an "institution," wags of the muster ground, quick-witted and brimful of fun.

There were usually from fifteen to twenty-five carts clustered near together, each pedler upon his cart, his own auctioneer, vying with all others to attract the multitude by telling stories, cracking jokes, or singing comical songs. They were a noisy, jolly set, dividing the attention of the throng with the evolutions of the troopers.

They vended gloves, mittens, wooden combs, high horn ones, beads, feather fans, and other small wares, and bought small peltry.

The crowd wandered around those attractions all day long, with hands hung loosely to pockets, or rested on convenient stones, chaffing, telling stories, or trading independently.

It whistled and whittled and hurrahed for the militia all over the ground. Boys sold their squirrel and woodchuck skins to pedlers, and swapped whatever indefinite hoard stuffs a boy's pocket, while men bartered all their belongings except their families, religion, and patriotism.

Muster-fields were selected by regimental officers, and they paid for the use of them. In choosing one, the officers were guided by several concurrent reasons, as its size, and it should be smooth and level grass-land,

and within reasonable distance should be a good place for rendezvous. Concerning the last the adjutant took great interest, for it gave him opportunity to show his ability and further his desire for promotion.

A regiment was usually required to be in line by seven o'clock in the morning, so the men were "warned to appear" by five or six, that company organizations might be made and breakfast eaten in season for regimental formation.

As soldiers and civilians were obliged to travel from ten to twenty miles, — often on foot, of course, — they consumed most of the previous night reaching the ground. Roosters crowed in barns, and tallow candles flitted from room to room of houses all along their route. Fun began when squads of soldiers collected, with full cartridge-boxes and powder-horns, and forthwith proceeded to "wake up" their officers. It was accomplished by firing under each officer's window until he asked them in to partake of liquid refreshment, for nearly all drank spirits moderately.

By law all male citizens between the ages of eighteen and forty-five years were enrolled, and, with few exceptions, liable to military duty.

Several towns were classed together by State authorities for regimental purposes, and each town was expected to furnish at least one company of infantry; then, if citizens of a town who were liable to military duty chose to form independent companies and uniform them-

selves, they were allowed to select their own officers, who were commissioned by the governor of the State, and assigned with their commands to positions in the regiments. Such officers were empowered with the same authority, and the companies were subject to the same duties, as the regular infantry. They were called light infantry, from part of their dress.

Then it was competent for individual citizens residing within regimental boundaries to organize rifle, artillery, or cavalry companies. So each regiment when it appeared on parade usually consisted of several companies of infantry, one or two of light infantry, and one each of rifle, cavalry, and artillery.

The officers of a regiment consisted of a colonel, lieutenant-colonel, adjutant, quartermaster, commissary, chaplain, surgeon, fife-major, and drum-major. Musicians appeared, with each his instrument, and were enrolled in the infantry troops, or enlisted in volunteer ones, or, if sufficient number applied to the authorities for such a purpose, they were formed into a band. In that case they were to perform all soldierly duties except as to equipment and bearing of arms. The regular infantry appeared on parade in citizen's dress, over which were strapped knapsack, canteen, bayonet-scabbard, and a cartridge-box capable of holding twenty-four cartridges. Each soldier, regular or volunteer, must also have a priming wire and brush, and two spare flints. He must bear a musket capable of carrying a ball, furnished with

a good flint, bayonet, iron or steel ramrod, all clean and ready for use. He was fined if he failed to have any one of those articles, the inspecting officer judging whether or not his accoutrements answered the legal requirements. Light infantry companies wore white linen pantaloons; blue or black coats trimmed with red, white, or yellow; tall shiny leather caps, bearing high white red-tipped plumes. They were required to be armed and equipped precisely as were the regulars; but the few sharpshooters might wear darker suits, small caps, and simple black feather. Artillerymen were accoutred in dark suits, red-striped, low or half-high cockaded hats, and wore over their dress, sword-strap and belt, from which hung sword and scabbard. Cavalrymen were attired in short pants stuck in high-topped boots, yellow-trimmed jackets, low caps, and long bending white plumes. They were armed with swords and pistols.

The Wednesday after 'Lisbeth went out to her uncle's was muster morning. The adjutant was astir on his black horse, galloping from troop to squad and straggling soldiers, long before five o'clock in the morning. Troops and citizens were arriving. Patriotism and martial pride ruled the town.

Advancing day disclosed the regulars in citizen's dress and military accoutrements, standing by their arms or sitting on grassy borders of the streets around the village green, and northerly, farther than Holderness Bridge.

Light infantry displayed its shiny caps and beautiful plumes down the street to the Thurlow Hill bend. Opposite the tavern, up Haverhill pike, red artillery stripes and cockades rose behind the cavalry's few but knightly top-boots and graceful feathers.

Visiting and happy rested and loitered that citizen soldiery. Long journeys and an almost sleepless night had left it buoyant, thrilling with patriotic fervor because it was not there to learn the art of war for another, but for itself, that so each man might be skilled to defend his own kingship.

The rising Indian summer sun caressed long lines of cleanly polished bayonets, warmed waving plume and shining epaulet, blessed flag, pennon, and guidon, and breathed a *pax vobiscum* upon that armed town. No lady went upon the field, but it was the bounden duty of women to make lovely window pictures many times multiplied and rearranged along the rendezvous lines.

Groups of girls were framed behind the panes, sunny-browed or demure, coquettish or prim, with curling locks or smooth-tressed, witchingly frowning as a favored officer rode by unheeding, or smiling when another touched his plumed hat. Behind them rows of caps enclosed sweet women's faces. Caps of thick muslin and double-plaited borders trimmed with one straight width of lutestring tied under the chin, caps fashioned out of soft, filmy lace adorned with knots, bows, and floating ribbons.

They made heartening portraitures as armed men filed past, and the air was alive and palpitating to fife and drum.

"Where is Captain —— and the Campton Light Infantry?" queried the regulars from thence.

The truth was, a squad in waking the captain had charged their muskets so heavily as to break some glass, and chip the woodshed underpinning. The last volley burst an old flintlock, tearing a thumb from a recruit as a preparation for an able and most excellent ministry. The accident belated them; but just as wonder grew to anxiety, a faint and far note of a bugle trilled down from Campton road, and soon the troop went marching past Squire Baker's at a swinging gait.

A little cloud went over Lois's white brow, for her true word was given to the debonair captain who hurried past without so much as raising his hand from the hilt of his sword.

He was descended from one whose great height, remarkable beauty, probity, ability, gentleness, and courage led the Indians to esteem him especially blessed of God. They never released an arrow against him, nor did he ever reside in a stockade.

The elastic figure and courteous movement of Lois's lover were said to be inherited, as were his large grayish-blue eyes, fine nose, full brows, and white forehead, from which a heavy crop of brown hair was carefully brushed. His gentle nature restrained a quaint humor and mar-

vellous gift of sarcasm. He added a peculiar shyness characteristic of proud, thoughtful men. He held his voice and well-played violin ready at call for evening pastimes or minor psalms. He scorned to be late, as did his command, so the troop went impatiently to its place opposite the tavern. The adjutant rode up as it halted, and inquired, "How soon will your company be ready, Captain?"

"All ready, Adjutant Russell. We breakfasted and called the roll on the march."

"There is plenty of time, Captain, and a cup of coffee is awaiting you at Squire Baker's while your men rest." Every soldier knew why there was such a curious glint in the adjutant's eye as he rode full tilt among them; for that martial figure on the coal-black steed, with saddle-cloth of red flannel wrought with gold braid, darted continually in and out among the troops, or to the tavern where the beautifully caparisoned horses of the colonel and his staff champed their bits.

"Adjutant Dave," as he was familiarly called, was an energetic and persistent young man, always free and obliging, and as proud a soldier as ever wore uniform; besides, he was one of the best horsemen in the State. A year before he had been overruled in choosing a field, so the regiment was called together in a hilly highway.

There being no room to manœuvre, officers became confused and lost their places, while the following men executed some strange movements.

The adjutant vowed to locate a field according to his own mind next time, and he had done so ; but mostly at his own expense, which gave him opportunity to perform one of his famous feats.

To reimburse himself he decided to charge applying tentholders and peddlers an entrance fee to the ground. They resented the tax as an infringement upon long held rights, and determined to go upon the muster ground night beforehand, knowing a legal process could not drive them out before muster.

Hearing of their intention, the adjutant posted a guard of resolute young men, his personal friends, around the field.

The traffickers appeared, refused to pay rental, and being satisfied they could not pass the guard, they consulted together, and finally at night crossed the intervalle and climbed the winding hill road.

The far side of both intervalle and muster field was skirted by a steep, rough, thickly wooded bluff. Covered by forest and darkness, they turned across Colonel Livermore's field to the top of the hill above the open parade, where they unhitched their teams, carried carts, tent materials, and merchandise down, and re-loaded. Finally, they wound down the stony scarp, leading oxen and horses, which they re-yoked and re-harnessed, and drove cautiously to the proper place. Many tents and carts were in place before the trick was discovered.

“Foreordination,” said the adjutant; “withdraw the guard.”

Everybody had heard the story, and each soldier shared the adjutant's ambition to make a comely entry upon ground he owned for the day. Even the boys hurried for him; and women eagerly remarked each careful movement as he formed the regimental column by company, in four files, headed by drum-major and fife-major.

At last drums rolled, banners waved, and the miniature army marched past windows filled with admiring sweethearts, wives, and mothers, to the training-ground across Holderness bridge on Livermore's intervalle, north side of the highway.

Shortly after it was followed by a cavalcade from the tavern, — the colonel and his staff, accompanied by a visiting general from Boston. They were uniformed in blue broadcloth trimmed with gold lace, buff vests, gold epaulets, and black cocked hats adorned with long black ostrich feathers. Their spirited horses were equipped with handsome bridles, breastplates, martingales, and saddles, and beautiful housings of flannel or skins.

When the colonel, surrounded by his aids and invited guests, rode up to take command, he saw on the level and open parade, against a background of baring bush and tree, six infantry companies in line, two ranks deep, men of all heights and sizes, clothed in homemade garb, some wearing caps, others high or half-high wool hats,

standing carelessly in a military point of view, but armed and equipped according to law, and full of zeal.

At their right stood two companies of light infantry in single rank, uniforms and arms fresh and bright. Still at the right were the musicians, massed; then an artillery company of fifty men posted in line on either side of a very small cannon, and on the extreme right of the regiment less than a hundred cavalymen, booted, spurred, and plumed, sat upon horses, black, white, bay, and dappled.

Behind the colonel the picture was completed by hundreds of men and boys dressed in homespun, shouting and joking around tents, carts, and screaming peddlers, or eagerly crowding up to the guard-line.

The commander's first orders formed his regiment into a hollow square for prayers. Every noise on the open parade ceased, all hats were removed, and the chaplain, Mr. Ward, with his white scarf about him, became the one reverently observed figure on that field, as he returned thanks for what arms had accomplished, petitioned for success if further conflict must needs be, and for the final sheathing of sword and bayonet everywhere.

Inspection immediately followed prayers, and began with cavalry, around which inspecting officers rode, and examined its swords and pistols one by one. If any imperfections were discovered, an aid noted it down.

Then the officers dismounted, examined the artillery

sabres, and walked around the poor little cannon, afterwards turning to the infantry, and inspecting its arms and equipments, which being completed, officers took their places for the review that closely followed.

At the conclusion of that military ceremony the colonel re-formed his battalion in hollow square, that it might listen to the address of the inspector general, who criticised, commended, and exhorted with dashes of martial wit, till buglers sounded the call to dinner. Ranks were hastily broken. Some of the men brought dinners from home, many patronized the victualling tents.

Squire Baker, a former commander of the battalion, invited the colonel, his guests and aids, to dinner.

It could be only a delightful nooning where the squire and his wife presided at the feast, where Lois and 'Lisbeth sparkled at the board.

Drill in the manual of arms was the afternoon occupation. Infantry filed right and left, halted, wheeled, faced about, and did all other acts and things in such cases made and provided.

Artillery thundered very loudly when one considered the size of its ordnance; and cavalry, proud and picturesque, reined its assortment of horses with remarkable precision, because every man was a horseman from necessity, though each discharge of artillery caused much rearing and snorting among the rustic steeds.

It frequently occurred toward the close of duty that the colonel granted to some minor officer the coveted

privilege of drilling the battalion for half an hour. He offered it to Adjutant Russell that afternoon with many expressions of commendation.

Immediately Adjutant Dave rode slowly along the line to the centre, chatted a moment with Captain Hobart, who held the right centre with a company of picked Plymouth men, then went into drill vigorously as was his wont, soon bringing the regiment into perfect sympathy with himself. He sent an orderly to the band with instructions to play Yankee Doodle until he finished the drill. At that moment the black horse felt a sharp spur-prick, and dashed beyond the guard line. He was reined head to the regiment and stood a moment's time, arching, curvetting, pawing before the advancing lines of sunlit steel, borne by soldiers strung to the highest pitch. When the regiment reached the guards an order rang clear as a bugle, —

“Charge bayonets; forward, double quick, march.”

The armed mass comprehended at once what was wanted of it, and hastened to obey. Song, jest, and story, auctioneers' cries, and pedlers' gains were broken off without point or period; for after one instant of completely dazed inaction, the whole crowd of sellers, buyers, and jokers scurried in all directions from that solid, excited, determined phalanx.

When the soldiers reached the tents they split them into kindling wood with their bayonets; tapped cider barrels and rum kegs; scattered gingerbread, pies, and

crackers; upset pedlers' carts, turning them over and over as far as they went; until they heard above the confusion "Halt," and "About face;" then they marched quietly back, some bayonets broken, many ornamented with pieces of gingerbread, crusts of pie, bungs of cider barrels and rum kegs, but each man feeling in himself a sense of duty done; and courteously returned to the colonel.

So Adjutant Dave's running account with hucksters was settled.

Review followed immediately, after which the battalion was dismissed, and started by many ways home the proudest, jolliest set of men that ever returned from muster.

Campton's Light Infantry captain and young Mayhew made merry at Squire Baker's; and the village store was crammed with men who told stories of Adjutant Dave, from his milk and pinafore days up to that afternoon.

CHAPTER XIX

MR. WILSON CARRIES A GRIST TO MILL

THE Monday after muster, Phil and one of the Kidder boys helped Mr. Wilson thresh wheat. While himself and Tom unbound some sheaves, and laid them, heads inward, in two long rows a foot apart, so that the

threshers might walk between, beating out the full kernels with swinging flails, he heard talking by the bay, where his neighbors' sons were fastening a loose flail-hinge. They had used some time at it, though it was a simple matter; for a hinge was only several leathern thongs nailed closely to the ends of two long round sticks.

He walked toward them, and heard Phil say, —

"I hope he'll go if he wants to."

"Who's goin', an' where to?" sharply demanded Mr. Wilson.

"He says John is, — to Boston."

"I don't b'lieve a word on't," replied Mr. Wilson; but still he felt disturbed. What if it were true?

What if he should go, holding 'Lisbeth's promise? He must see to it. How? well —

"I'll bet he is goin'!" exclaimed Jack. "For when I went up to borror the winowin' mill this mornin', Mr. Lane was fixin' a hair trunk, an' Mis' Lane was wipin' her eyes, they was real red; an' when I asked him for the winowin' mill he snapped shorter'n a pipe stem, an said 'Yes; take the mill, or barn, or anything else,' he didn't care a cent!"

"Is that flail mended?" queried Mr. Wilson tartly. "We've tew more floorin's to thrash an' winner, an' it's goin' on to sundown."

He did some powerful threshing in his mind before he went to supper, and after the meal was over, he ordered the boys thus, —

“Jack, you an’ Tom go an’ shell three bushels of old corn, an’ one of new for hominy; we must grind enough to last while we are gittin’ out the oats an’ doin’ fall ploughin’. I can’t go to mill till afternoon to-morrer, but I want it ready.”

Truth was, he had concluded to go to Plymouth and, as chance offered, settle ’Lisbeth’s future while waiting for his grist. Speech was difficult to these reticent men, who regarded loquacity as a specious form of temptation, to be fought against and overcome. He reached the matter very badly at last, in his hurry to have it over.

It was just as the supper ended at Squire Baker’s, responding to the squire’s request that ’Lisbeth stay with them during the winter, attending the Academy, —

“Well, she can’t, William, as I see. I s’pose ’Lisbeth expects to take a reg’lar school in the spring; ’tenerate, her mother an’ I plan for it, an’ it’s good as settled.”

“Why, ’Lisbeth!” cried the family, but she simply regarded her father in blank astonishment. He blundered on, —

“She knows she can have it, an’ I’ve passed my word. Only one scholar, though.”

“Who?” sternly questioned the squire.

“Philip Harmon.”

“You mean Elizabeth is to marry him next spring?”

“Yes, that’s it; an’ she must begin spinnin’ an’ mak-

in' her things ; for I lay out to give her a good marriage portion."

The Baker boys were furious, and tore out doors, & their mother dropped a teacup. Mr. Wilson said, as he rose from the table, that he would do some errands at Russell's store, and come back, as the grist would not be ready till seven. Mrs. Baker wiped the china carefully, leaving her husband to parley with himself. A historian thus describes his character : " A man of great personal dignity, grave, reserved, retiring, yet always ready at the call of duty ; of profound convictions and great courage in maintaining them ; of unswerving adherence to principle ; and of spotless integrity, whose words, never superfluous, were inviolable. Upon public questions his voice was clear and prophetic ; in the church his counsels always made for peace and righteousness. At the bar his knowledge of law was so correct, his sense of justice so keen, that in one case of appeal to the Court of Common Pleas, the judge inquired from whose decision the appeal was taken. On being told, he answered the attorney that it was scarcely worth while to prosecute the appeal, since the colonel's decisions were always found correct."

It was he who now called to mind his promise to the King ; and he followed 'Lisbeth, who had wandered drearily into the parlor. She was standing by the high mantel, her head against it, and arms hanging limp beside her.

The weary figure smote his heart like a blow. He went straight to her, and spoke very gently, —

“I am sorry for you and John, Elizabeth.”

“O uncle!” was all she uttered; there was no crying, no quiver, only despair.

“Tell me all about it, Elizabeth. I wish to help. Such events in a young girl’s life are sacred, and I feel the utmost diffidence in approaching the subject. But sore trouble threatens you, and I desire to save the perilled happiness of two lives very dear to me.”

He hesitated, then added, “But you shall speak or not, as you choose, my child.”

“I must speak; I have to. I cannot, I think I will not, marry Philip Harmon; but then, what is to be done? Tell me, do tell me, uncle, if there is any way out.”

“Yes, child, one; you will follow the straight path of duty, justice, and womanly truth. To miss that is to fail utterly.”

His composed courage so fortified her, that a pitiful ghost of a smile flitted across her face, as he continued, —

“There, now, Elizabeth, come and sit down by me. We begin at the beginning. About this young Harmon, it seems you have refused him, and your decision is overruled on appeal as it were.”

“Why, no, uncle; Phil has not spoken to me.”

“I’m surprised,” said he, taking the snuffers and clip-

ping the candlewick while he controlled a rising temper; for, though the King had so claimed, he had believed that good soul mistaken about it — “surprised. It seems incredible. He — but go on, my dear; proceed cautiously and slowly. Tell me exactly how you understand it.”

“Phil has never asked me to marry him, nor mentioned it. I really think he likes Eunice Batchelder better than any girl, or anybody but himself; but he is conceited, uncle. He is simply trying to prove himself too smart for me. His father’s property will be his; a good farm well-stocked and some money, it is said. He is honest, industrious, and capable, belongs to the church, and father favors him. That is all.”

“He means to marry you whether or no. The case has some peculiar features,” and he smiled grimly.

“We will put Harmon by for awhile, pigeonhole his case, and take up young Mayhew. Know much as to his side of this affair? He has addressed your father?”

“Yes, — and me.”

“Of course, my child, he is no thief. Your troth is plighted to him, and your father refuses to sanction it?”

“Yes, sir; but, say, uncle, why does he go away?”

“Because it is best for you both, — unless you will marry him.”

“In plain disobedience to my father?”

“Certainly.”

“Would it be right?”

“Answer for yourself.”

Her face flushed like the rosy dawn at first, then became gray and hopeless; but she replied firmly, —

“It would be very wrong.”

“Then he must go. What else can hinder?”

“Nothing,” quivered through the white lips; and she continued, grasping his sleeve, “I want to do my duty, to honor my father; but do not ever tell me I must marry the other one.”

“Never; Harmon’s conduct is unfair, unmanly, an attempt to steal what he cannot rightly win.”

“Suppose father disowns me?”

“Disowns you? Disowns you, Elizabeth? He will not.”

“Grandma threatened it.”

“She did? You poor child! Let them try it! Elizabeth, Thomas Wilson is too proud to make a public spectacle of his family; but John Mayhew is worth suffering for, keep your faith in him. No righteous law can dispose of your life, you unconsenting; and I counsel you never to disgrace your womanhood by marrying that cur down towards the turnpike.

“Your memory will be a shield to John, and at least both can die true to the gracious love that blesses each, and meet without shame in that land where love finds its own unquestioned. Go to your room a little while, and come back peaceful.”

The squire was angry; in fact, he was never so

furious in his life. The whole affair was contemptible, and the more he conned it, the worse it looked.

When Mrs. Baker entered the room she found him striding back and forth from table to fireplace, a most unregenerate scowl wrinkling his brows.

The gentle woman paid no attention, but laid a fresh hard maple stick across the andirons, brushed back the light ashes with a gray goose-wing, lighted the candles in the bright silver candlestick on the mantel, placed a pair of snuffers beside it, and went to the table. Mr. Baker took a paper, and sat down. She placed a chair near him, and drew some knitting from a basket. She possessed the sweet quietude of many women in those homes. There was something telling even in their manner of laying down work or taking it up; an elegance in the polite flutter of cap-borders, and slow wafting of pale tinted untied cap-strings, that floated back over their shoulders. Their touch was a benediction; their lives, psalms. Mrs. Baker had held an experience meeting all by herself out in the supper-room, and fully sympathized with her husband. She unrolled the work, unwound some yarn, laid the ball in her lap, and gazed at him. How proud she was of him, and how handsome he looked in plum-colored velvet coat and buff waistcoat, and breeches fastened to silk hose by silver buckles. The ruffled shirt softened his shapely hands, and lent a peculiar grace to the well-poised head. Glancing again, she perceived that his

New Hampshire Patriot was wrong side up, and the scowl had deepened. Rising, she brushed back the grayish hair from his fine forehead, and smoothed his stock, saying, —

“There now, father, let me take out this little wrinkle, and seems to me this ruffle is broken a mite under your chin.”

“There’s no trouble with the ruffle; I wish you would let me alone.”

“Why, father, you must be calm.”

“Oh, yes, of course! just as composed as our old clock in the corner. Certainly.”

“Why, how you do talk! What ails you?”

“Brother-in-law! got it all over from head to foot, soul and body.”

“William! are you speaking of Thomas?”

“Yes, I am, Lois; that same old tyrant.”

“Why, dear me! there!”

“Were you at the table this evening or not?”

“I was there, husband.”

“You were! Do you remember any startling news related by our dear brother during the meal, or announcement of his intention to marry ’Lisbeth out of hand to Harmon, knowing he sets out to spoil two lives by wilfulness?”

“Thomas will do right in the end, I do believe.”

“Will he? When will he begin? He never beats around the bush. I heard only a plain, square notice of settled purpose.”

"Sit down, father, do; you will bring Thomas round."

"Bring him round, eh? It takes a sharp bit to rein *him*; he may make one to tear his own tongue and bring himself about, but it will be by a long turn and hard one, mind my words."

"How you do talk! I never heard the like of it, never." He rose. "Sit down, William, do. I'm frightened; some dreadful thing will happen."

"It's happening — one of the worst. Thomas is playing tyrant, and that attempt is paid for the world over. He'll settle the bills in my judgment to the last fo'pence ha'p'ny."

"Here, William," beating a cushion, "take your paper and sit down. I'll snuff the candles."

"I don't wish to read; I can't. John pays his last visit here this evening, this very evening; do you hear, Lois? And our dear brother is coming too. Well arranged, isn't it? I declare," he continued, stopping short, "I believe he just planned it on purpose."

"Nobody knows he is going but the Lanes, and they are close-mouthed people; besides, he came with a grist."

"Who ever heard of his coming to mill at this time a-day? Corn never brought him over the hubbly roads to ride back with that old horse at night. He is settling things. He's a pattern man, Thomas is."

"Oh, dear me! you frighten me."

"This whole business is heathenish, Lois. I hope he

won't stir me up any. I can't say what I might do. I feel like swearing, Lois; I've a good mind to swear."

"Oh! oh!" said she helplessly as he brushed her aside, then faced her, saying,—

"Now, then, Lois, now then, he's a thundering old idiot, that's what he is, and I won't take back a word or a syllable."

"Why, William! whyee-ee-ee!"

"I can't help it; that man ought to be sent to an asylum for the irresponsible or else tied to a whipping-post."

Rap, tap, tap went the front door knocker.

"There is John, and 'Lisbeth will soon be back; I'm going to run."

"You cannot, and you must not."

"I can, and I shall. I'm ashamed to see either of them,—feel like a dog;" and he made his way out of one door as John entered at the other.

CHAPTER XX

HIS GRIST IS GROUND

MRS. BAKER greeted Mayhew warmly, for her heart ached for the motherless man, driven from his sweetheart and dreams of a home. She was glad for him when 'Lisbeth came in, crewels in hand, with Lois.

The squire returned with heightened dignity to find Mr. Wilson and John discussing the crops.

Immediately politics, perennial theme of New Hampshire men and women,—they were all brought up to it,—became the topic.

This country was rooted in living souls, thrice blessed will the future State become if it shall expand and grow to the perfect fruitage of such benign planting.

Mr. Wilson found himself admiring John exactly as he had that morning when he began haying.

"I do believe I'm kinder hankerin' after him," he told himself, then grew stern, and recollected that his errand was not so much grinding of corn as other things. He wished to know if that dangerous youngster was going away, so he changed the subject.

"By the way, I heard some of the boys say you're goin' to Boston."

"I expect to go."

"Soon?"

"Next Thursday."

"Sho! You'll be home first."

"Yes, to-morrow."

"Goin' into law, I s'pose. Well, you've heard the old story."

The squire felt like giving his brother-in-law a piece of his mind, and the foolish remark afforded an opportunity. A glance at 'Lisbeth bent over her embroidery beside his own mischievous Lois sharpened the retort.

"Thomas, that old story is a lie to begin with, and has been musty since '76. Heavens! I wonder what gunpowder would have been worth, without law to frame the constitution and such like documents. Freedom wasn't made entirely out of prayers and flintlocks."

Brother-in-law Thomas was fierce in asking, "Do you suppose we got along without 'em?"

"No, I do not; I've heard prayer fiery enough to touch off a gun, and no doubt it did, and I've listened to that chilly enough to freeze powder."

Here Mrs. Baker tried to stay the electrical storm, and drew its whole force. "Thomas, I hear the Powells have brought Becky home, and I hope it is true. How could they be so cruel?"

"Cruel, Lois! Her father done right; 'twan't a question of choosin', but duty. When there's only one road laid out afore your face, you've got to travel it, or miss the way. There's no turnin' into by and forbidden paths. We've got to set our faces like flints agin' sech things."

"She isn't at home, then?"

"Yes, she is, that's the plague on't; it upsets discipline, then where are we?"

The squire determined to nail the matter on the spot, and see whether Mr. Wilson was speaking from direct purpose, or at random.

"It was a shame, Thomas. What if her father did

command her to marry that old man? She could not obey. Daughters are not traded like cattle. Take the question home, Thomas, what would you do in a like case? You could not do so."

Mr. Wilson looked at his beautiful child, growing blanced meanwhile, then met the squire's challenging gaze, and finally lifted his eyes to the proud, supreme face of the young man, not once dropping them, as he answered measuredly, —

"I should foller my duty — to the end."

"Thomas Wilson," said the squire, "if you are taking that pace, you better find out what duty is before you start."

"Duty is foll'win' the doctrines. I'm goin' that gait, the only one I ever knew."

John rose, and asked, —

"Are you speaking particularly to me?"

"Yes, I am; you know that. My daughter there marries Philip Harmon next spring."

John answered him, —

"Harmon seeks a sort of servant who will stint, and spare, and obey; I, a helper, friend. He asks your daughter out of selfishness; I, because she is — 'Lisbeth."

"There's things more important than happiness, an' I hope this disappointment will tend to your good."

The squire stepped forth, saying, —

"Thomas Wilson, what I hear concerns both law and

conscience. Suppose she marries Harmon, she must promise to love him. She does not. She cannot. Do you know what that promise is called in law? Perjury, — a State-prison offence. She will make no such oath."

He took John's hand, and said, —

"Elizabeth, come to me," and the girl moved wonderingly to him.

"John Mayhew," said he, "do you love my niece, and will you make open declaration of it here?"

"I do love her, and will avow it anywhere so long as I live."

"Elizabeth, what do you answer in this presence?"

The reply was very tremulous, but there was no uncertainty in it.

"My father knows I have promised to be John Mayhew's wife, and I mean to keep my word."

"'Lisbeth! 'Lisbeth! you shall not, you never shall. Give her to me, William Baker."

"Wait."

"I won't wait. She's my gal, she ain't of age."

"Be quiet, Thomas, for you shall listen. There should be publishment of marriage banns, so, in this unaccustomed manner, I announce the intention of marriage between these two persons," laying the girl's hand in her lover's, who raised it to his lips.

The great dignity and baronial spirit of the squire first controlled Mr. Wilson, and the sovereign authority

of the last move stunned him, but he burst loose from it, exclaiming, —

“Every syllable you’ve spoke comes to nothin’. I, ’Lisbeth’s father, tell you to give my gal back to me. Her promise ain’t no good ’thout my consent.”

Mayhew held him back with one arm long enough to say, —

“Hear me, Mr. Wilson. For the most part I respect you, and my worst wish is that a change to brighter hope may be near you, and the old fashion of bitterness be done away. My conscience disallows my taking your child against your will. I am going away, but I shall return for my own. When you send for me, I will come; till then I am obedient to the command of separation, because God has bestowed on you such exceeding grace as to make you father to this girl. Here, freely I return this treasure, which one day you will gladly restore,” and bowing, he went out.

At first Mr. Wilson insisted that ’Lisbeth should go home with himself, but on reflection he concluded to let her stay, she being safe anywhere, for the youth would keep his word, that he knew.

John spent the whole next day at the squire’s, and toward sunset gravely, tenderly, spoke good-bys to the family, then asked ’Lisbeth to walk with him to the top of Thurlow Hill; and so, in the golden glory of a November sunset, those two took their way down the village street, past the Emerson house, across the brook, and

climbed the long, steep, stony hill, in silence all the way. Only after they passed the houses he took her hand and kept it.

Upon the level summit, silent still, they put off the parting for a brief space, smothering their grief and summoning courage for the final sacrifice. Every feature of that exquisite landscape stamped itself upon their memories for all time, so curiously does the mind grasp at surroundings, seeking to cheat the pain of coming distress. Below, far down, narrow, passing from sight among Campton hills, spread the bronze green valley of the Pemigewassett, the winding gray-blue river wandering now hither, now yon, through its entire length. On the high bluff across the meadows smoke curled from the stately Livermore mansion; and on the nearer side, the lovely hamlet of Plymouth twinkled its first evening lights upon the slope, a perfect jewel set on the finger of the hills.

More than a score of dwellings straggled along Main Street and up Haverhill pike. On a little hillock fronting the village green, Holmes Academy uplifted its white spire, and the blunt belfry of the court house marked a famous arena on which Webster, Sullivan, Smith, Mason, and their princely compeers waged mighty forensic warfare.

Nearly a mile up the Haverhill road, crowning Ward Hill, the old Congregational church rose like an unarmed two-story fort, bare, dominant, solid.

Around on every hand the cool bluish hills uplifted, towering rank on rank, even to the horizon's utmost verge, melting into misty outline beyond, where Osceola caps Campton peaks.

Black and Welch, Fisher and Tecumseh, were mated by farther summits. They saw Franconia Notch cleft through buttressed granite, and forever warded by that calm, unanswering, awful Face, sculptured by Almighty God upon the mountain's topmost cliff.

Behind those peaks the long whale back of Mount Washington was hidden, and both round about them and behind stood their mighty brethren of the White Hills. The ledgy spur of Thurlow Hill screened Moosehillock's graceful dome. The far-off summits were silvery gray; nearer the hills still burned with late autumn fires, or melted into gold in sunny nooks, while the valley slept and dreamed between.

Not till lengthening shadows turned to certain dusk over the village, and messengers of evening on red and gold and heavy purple pinions flew upward from the departed sun, did they put into words the thoughts that swelled their aching hearts. She smiled hopelessly up at him, and there was a quivering cadence of despair in his voice, —

"It is almost dark, dear soul, and you must go. 'Lisbeth, 'Lisbeth, my heart is breaking for you and for me."

She was silent, and he stumbled on brokenly, —

"All I have lived and prayed for will be taken from me here, and yet my heaviest sorrow is for you. What will you do? O 'Lisbeth, what can you do?"

"I can be true to you, John."

"You are my very betrothed, and we have spent this day together," then he faced away from her only to return, saying fiercely, —

"I cannot lose you, and I will not."

"Do you doubt me, John?" The question was proudly phrased.

"Oh, my dear love, forgive me. I have no distrust of you, but an awful fear of what you may endure. They will coax, insist, demand, threaten, — disinherit, — then what?"

"I shall withhold my lips from lying, and my soul from sacrilege."

"If the last happens, may I come for you? Do consent so far."

"I cannot tell. You must trust me, John. Nothing is better than truth. We shall be in the same world. We can sometimes look into each other's faces without shame too, do you hear, dear — proudly, without shame."

He was brushing the wavy hair back fondly, and she continued self-contained, —

"Once for all, John Mayhew, successful or unfortunate, rich or poor, living or dead, I love you only, always; neither shall I listen to any other while I live."

"Lisbeth," he answered, "my truth and manhood are pledged to you. No oath can add one iota to our second betrothal." Then, after a moment, "Go now, beloved, for the valley darkens ; I will watch you down the hill."

The hour of supreme renunciation was come, the sacrifice was completed, but the sorrow overmastered tears. Reaching up, she took his face in both her hands and gazed earnestly on each feature, gravating the image on her heart, then drawing his head down, she kissed him. For one brief moment he gathered her in his arms, and rained kisses on her eyes, her hair, her hands, the next they walked apart with pain so awful that they both were dumb. John watched the swaying figure, bent by woe, as it stumbled over loose stones, saw late golden-rod leaning across the gurgling waters of a wayside run and touching her blue dress, marked with bitter pride how resolutely her face was turned from him, till a curve carried her behind a long row of alder bushes that reached to the village street.

A loud clatter of hoofs among rolling pebbles, a heavy whip-crack, and an eight-horse stage laden with twelve passengers, piles of bandboxes, and trunks with handles and studded with nails, rolled by him.

On the box sat a young man, smooth-faced, bearing a master's look in the clear, deep blue eyes, with muscles like strong cords, and brown as a berry. It was a hard hill, the wheel horses could not possibly hold back such a load ; so he gathered up the reins in an iron grip,

flicked his long whip close to the leaders' ears, and the whole team sprang on a dead run down the hill. Presently he heard a mellow horn, and knew the stage was clattering up to the tavern door.

In the same breath the King and his dogs whisked down the ledges from the pine woods on his left.

"Hello, John, ain't that bustin'? Don't Jim Langdon know a thing or tew 'bout stagin'? Well, I guess! I've seen that other young feller, Marden, dew the same thing. I reckon ev'ry hoss them boys lays a rein over knows 'em. Seems to me they send word 'long the ribbins, else how could they go lick-e-ty-split that way 'thout killin' the whole bilin', an' scatterin' the stage for kin'lin' wood. Goin' home, ain't ye?"

"Yes."

"I see your uncle carryin' your traps; so, bein' only t'other side the hill, I run 'roun' to walk 'long. Pore comp'ny, the dogs an' me, but p'raps we'll shorten the road a little."

"You are kind, and make the journey pleasanter."

"Come, pups, where be ye? We're goin' home, an' we don't want no runnin' roun'."

Deaf immediately to all blandishments of the woods, they settled into a "dog-trot" ahead of their master. The King had been lying on pine needles, or sitting on a rock for two hours. He saw the pair come up the hill, and one descend it in grievous fashion. The sight had drawn some tears down his furrowed cheeks, and he

told the dogs, then and there, that he would "tend tew things, if we never see another wile-cat, nor track a bear agin."

He hitched up the empty game-bag, and slouched along, evidently uneasy, till John, remarking it, said, —

"Well, Uncle David?"

"I'm thinkin', John."

"So I see."

"I dunno how tew begin; where's them pesky dogs?"

"Right here; under foot almost."

"So they be; how I dew wish Nabby was here."

In spite of all, John smiled.

"You see, she isn't, and you are not afraid of me."

"No, sir, I ain't. When it comes tew bein' feared, there's nothin' in the woods or outen 'em that I'm scairt on; on'y this seems kinder meddlin', somehow," giving his game-pouch another pull.

"You never could do that, Uncle David. Does this matter concern me?"

"Some it does, an' some it don't, but I'm most worried 'bout t'other one."

"What one?"

"Her," jerking his thumb backward toward the hamlet.

"Mr. King! what is it? Any new trouble?"

"I guess she's got 'nuff, poor gal, an' there ain't any more comin' if I can help it."

John grasped the King's hand, who made a great to-

do, calling to his dogs; but before they reached Mr. Lane's he had, by dint of much bad grammar, delicately used, given John to understand that his eye would be swift to see, and if it became necessary, he should readily shoulder his gun, and carry peltry to Boston markets. And the lover was comforted; for the tides of youth set strongly, filling up many a footprint of care in hopefully shifting sands, whereon they ebb and flow. And 'Lisbeth came to supper much as usual, only a faint, wistful, pathetic aspect had come into her eyes that would never depart. It is thus that shadows grow in beloved faces, only to be swept away when the majestic Healer, Death, smooths from unsensing lineaments the cruel furrows drawn by ploughshares of pride and thoughtlessness.

CHAPTER XXI

HOYT'S TAVERN

HOYT's tavern was an old hostelry down by the foot of the Pond, famous as Partridge's before the first red stage came up the turnpike. The tavernkeeper was known as Squire Hoyt or Uncle Abe, just as it happened. He was a small, wiry man; keen, blue-eyed, and fairish-haired; stern on occasion, kindly, thoughtful,

quick of wit. He said, 'Jess so, jess so, sir,' most amiably, but a sham fared hardly at his hands. Many a poor boy or man tramping northward to settle wild land was freely supplied with the tavern's best, not mentioning a generous supply of food to take along in the morning, because, Uncle Abe explained, "the poor devil had a thunderin' hard row to hoe 'thout sleepin' out nights and half starvin' on the way."

His enormous barns were stuffed full of sweet hay and oats grown on the hillside. Six horses harnessed to a stage pranced on the great signboard, and underneath was inscribed, "A. P. Hoyt, Stage Tavern." There was comfort even in the outside of that yellow, two-storied, piazzaed, rambling, airy house, showing dimity curtains at guest-chamber windows; and a roaring fire, from a four-foot rock maple backlog and forestick, filled in between with cleft wood, threw its sparkling welcome out into the chill darkness through the windows of the big main room.

Similar inns dotted all turnpikes and roads through the State, at distances of from three to seven miles, seldom more, lest drivers should lose an hour or two before sunset, in order to be sure of some harborage at nightfall.

Teams were made up of oxen alone, horses by themselves, or of oxen hitched to cart and sled tongues, horses leading.

Those going "down below" dragged pine masts to the

coast, hemlock to tan-vats, and the "truck and dicker" from country stores to exchange for merchandise. Traveling buyers, who went from farm to farm picked up produce, flaxseed, small peltry, the overplus of looms, homemade hose, called "feetin'," and whatever was buyable, and carted it all "down below."

Every few miles that serious drama of the road was brightened by merry andrews on red carts, the wags of muster-fields many times multiplied. They halted, jesting and gossipy, at hill farmhouses; exchanged blue calico, beads, combs, and what not for rags, eggs, or odd yards of linen, and wore the jester's cap and bells down the turnpike to market.

Returning teams brought sugar, lamps, oil, dyestuff, school-books, tobacco, snuff, not to speak of the great staple, — liquors. Everything, from crewels to powder-horns and ploughshares, were hauled over drifts in winter, through dust in summer, along those rugged lines of commerce. Teamsters were resolute and trusty men. Lawyers journeying from one country seat to another, people paying visits, those going down to factories or returning from them, made a large part of travellers by stage, chaise, or on horseback.

The latter classes occupied guest chambers; but teamsters, as a rule, made a common dormitory of the public-room, saving each his ninepence, less or more, and insuring warm quarters to himself.

Each driver helped take care of his own horses or

oxen, then threw his bearskin over his shoulders, took a little trunk containing food, and went into the tavern with a nod and good-evening to the landlord.

Mrs. Lane brought John down to Hoyt's the evening before he started for Boston. Just after they entered, a horn merrily trumpeted, and the Haverhill stage banged and clattered up to the friendly doors. It brought a few passengers, who, with many "Ah's" and "Oh's" and "Bless me's," dropped down and crawled out and hurried in to the fire.

John and his aunt went to Mrs. Hoyt's sitting-room till strangers were fitly housed. Pete, the general utility boy, ran up the stairs with luggage, stirred fires, and jumped lively for an ordered flip.

Strangers at old-fashioned taverns were guests indeed. Those at Squire Hoyt's descended at bell-call to find the landlord and his wife waiting to preside at the bountiful table, with a roaring fire at one side of it, and two beautiful bright oil lamps upon it. John and Mrs. Lane shared the meal, the innkeeper specially desiring John should be acquainted with a guest, young Quincy of Boston.

Meantime, men in the great public room warmed themselves and laid their supper each upon his trunk cover. As the last men were about finishing the meal one broke a stick from the woodpile, whittled it to a point, speared a piece of cheese, and toasted it before the fire.

"My pie is almost froze. I'll fix it," said a grizzled man.

He stripped a piece of birch bark from a log, put his pie on it, and laid it down on the hearth, close to hot embers. The bark curled over it, making a warm oven.

"Where did you learn that kink?" inquired a young man just from the private table. "Give me a bit of pie, won't you? I want to try it."

"Dew, tuck the bark up close."

The youth attempted it, and jumped back, exclaiming, —

"Phew! Blazes! I've blistered my finger."

The graybeard eyed him with a you'll-know-better-next-time nod as he said deliberately, —

"Experunce mostly hurts. Nex' time keep the bark 'tween your hand and the bricks."

"Thank you, sir," replied the young man; "I was a simpleton not to ask help."

His inquisitor regarded him kindly, saying, —

"I took you for a big-feelin' upstart, but I'm mistook. Who be ye?"

• "My name is Quincy."

"Not from hereabouts, I guess."

"No, sir."

"Boston?"

"Yes, sir."

"Buyin' sunthin', I s'pose?"

"Yes, lumber and masts; but after this trip I shall only be here occasionally."

"Sorry."

"See here, Hobert, gimme a piece of that cheese," called a man across the fireplace. "Swap even?" he inquired, holding a doughnut on his jack-knife.

Quincy drew up to the table where one and another were reading the weekly papers. Every little while a man read a paragraph aloud, and immediately several round about the checkerplayers near by took it up, and discussion spread over the room, till even those who traded jack-knives and "swapped yarns" by the fire entered the spirited contest.

"Say, mister," said a youth who came in on the stage, squatting before him they called Parker, "have you lived with Indians?"

"S'posen I have?"

"Can't you tell us a story?"

"Yarns ain't in my line, youngster; 'sides, I hain't lived with 'em."

"Oh!" The expression voiced all a boy's disappointment; and there was a world of courtesy in his look and manner which softened Parker, and he inquired, —

"Where'd you come from?"

"Derryfield."

"Where you goin' tew?"

"Hanover."

"Hey! college, I reckon."

"Yes, sir."

"Lucky. Where'd you find the money?"

"Earned it working and keeping school."

"Did? Well, I've been 'mong Injuns, buyin' pelts an' gimcracks, boy."

"Will you tell us a story?"

"Mebbe; I'll see if I can ketch on to one."

"Story, story!" shouted the men. Quincy put his hand up.

"Hold on, wait a moment; let's have some coffee first. It's my treat for the good fellowship that has followed me all up and down this State."

"Good; thankee; good," echoed all over the room.

"Here, Uncle Abe, coffee for twenty. Will you take a mug, sir?" to John, who then entered.

"Thank you; yes, I shall enjoy one."

"Twenty-one, then."

"Here, Pete," called the innkeeper to the chore-boy, "run to the kitchen an' tell 'em to fill two big pitchers with smoking hot coffee, an' bring mugs from the bar. Mr. Quincy, I'm glad you an' John Mayhew have met. Don't lose sight of him, an' tell your father he's the best we ever raise."

The door into the entry slowly opened, and a ragged, weary, very dejected boy, perhaps sixteen years old, pushed half way in, and hesitated miserably.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Squire Hoyt; "what's this?"

"May I warm me a minit?" pleaded the boy.

"Come right straight to the fire," said Mr. Hoyt, taking the shivering lad through an open way. "There, warm yourself. Who are you?"

"Jim Sawyer."

"Where's your father?"

"Dead," and his lip quivered; so did many others of those crowding round.

"Where's your mother?"

"Tew home."

"Near here?"

"No; up tew Bath."

"Where've you been?"

"Down below."

"Seeking your fortune, hey? 'Pon my soul, you look as if you'd found it! Got 'nuff on't?"

"Yes, sir; an' I'm tryin' tew git back home."

"Good! Jess so, jess so; that's right, my boy, an' I s'pose you've tramped all the way."

"Yes, sir."

"Pretty likely you'll find your fortune where you left it, — with your mother; you ain't cut out for hustlin'. Thankee, Quincy; here, Jim, take a stiff swig of this hot coffee. Thanks, men; mother'll put some things in your packs," he said, as one and another helped the boy to wholesome food. "There, now, set still in the corner an' toast yourself; then Pete'll take you up to bed: you'll have to rest a day or so."

"An' I'll take him to Haverhill, an' get a teamster to take him home," said Marden; "he's got the makin' of a man in him, for he knows enough to go back and begin new," nodding encouragingly toward the happy boy already half asleep.

"Story, story!" cried they all.

"I'm off the trail of Injuns," said he they called Parker, "but I remember this; it happened tew me."

Indian stories went round while they drank their coffee, and then followed an incident possible nowhere else in the wide world.

A man, evidently a conceited schoolmaster, had gradually drawn his chair midway the group, and airily interrupted and embellished narrative and legend with Latin phrases and remarks as to what he heard in college. Those men had great esteem for learning, but none for a coxcomb.

"Uncle Abe" had turned a quizzical eye towards him several times. He drank his coffee, premising it with an astonishing flourish and bow to young Quincy, then pulled out a pipe and filled it.

"I like live embers best for tew light my pipe," said one, dipping his filled pipe-bowl into a bed of them.

"A live coal's the thing," corrected the prig; "in short, one may call it a *desideratum*; yes, truly a *desideratum*."

"Certainly," said Parker, "'tis. I want some; gimme the tongs," and with exquisite mimicry he broke a coal for his own pipe.

The coxcomb, unmindful of the laugh which followed, finished smoking, and called for a glass of flip. The landlord was already incensed, and when he swung his glass swaggeringly before he drank, remarking, —

“*Dum vivimus vivamus*, Squire Hoyt,” the squire turned quickly, replying, —

“Ah, jess so, jess so, sir; an’ dumb fool, too, sir.”

During the derisive mirth of approval two young men reached up over the fireplace and took some fiddles down. They scraped them into tune with an old tuning-fork, and played all music upon them from trill to chant, from “Virginia Reel” to “Old Hundred.” The guests sang when they knew the lines, and listened to the rest. Finally one said, —

“Can you play and sing ‘Boston Tea,’ boys? that’s the song to-night. One of us lives there, an’ another’s goin’. New Hampshire’s mighty good tew Boston.”

“She’s tew good all roun’,” remarked a quiet man; “an’ now the boys air trampin’ out West, wherever that is. My boy’s gone, though there ain’t nothin’ out there but fever’n ager, Injuns an’ rattlesnakes, fur’s I know.”

“Tune up; sing,” ordered the leader. “‘The Boston Teaparty,’ you all know it; sing.”

Hurrah, my boys, come sing the tale
Of the Indian hordes with me,
Who climbed the sides of the Dartmouth ship
And made that Boston tea.

They scooped it up by chest and box,
That herb of keen delight,
And out of the stern and over the bow
Flung it with all their might.

They hoaxed the dames of high degree,
Who waited beside the urns,
And gossipped, and scowled, and nodded, till
Their lamps had ceased to burn.

Then wide flew the doors; each ruffled lord,
In velvet and powdered queue,
Cried, Madam, the tea has shipped a sea,
Not a half pound left for you.

But 'twas a luscious drink we made
King George's redcoats gay;
A harbor full of home-brewed tea,
Way down in Boston Bay.

The clock struck nine, and the tired men prepared for rest.

"Hadn't you better ride with me? I shall be pleased if you will," said Quincy to John.

"I must be there Saturday."

"So must I."

"If you're goin', John," interrupted Marden, "I sh'd like to take you fur as I go, darned if I shouldn't!"

"Thank you kindly, both of you; I'll go to Concord with Mr. Marden, and gladly the rest of the way with you, Mr. Quincy."

"All right, we meet at Gasses', good-night," said Mr. Quincy. Pete blew up a coal and lighted a candle, pre-

ceding the young man to a warm, clean chamber, very fresh and comfortable, having a large braided rug beside the bed.

John lingered some time with his aunt; it was hard to say a last good-night to the faithful woman who had mothered him even as one of her own sons. He felt sure her heart ached; but she was brave, and helped him away to save grief for himself and 'Lisbeth.

In the great bar-room brawny men were passing into dreamland on soft beds of skins, with their feet to a smouldering fire, the burning logs being covered with ashes so they might char through the night and open like the heart of a coal-pit in the morning. The men had well earned the comfort they enjoyed; and besides that, they were very interesting people, for there was scarcely a common man, one who thought of himself and lived solely for himself, among them. They were sons of heroes who marched from Bunker Hill to battlefield after battlefield till the Revolution ended; who melted in the fierce heats of southern suns; whose feet were bare and bleeding in the snows of Valley Forge; who suffered where New Hampshire's stainless knight, the intrepid and chivalric Scammel, led. Before them stars and orders paled, behind them a new empire, resting on moveless foundations of granite character, lifted its radiant forehead to the heavens. Moreover, themselves were heroes; for they went steadily on, bearing their common burdens of homely duty with a kingly spirit,

alert and zealous in all affairs of church and state, full of love and hope and courage for their country, proud as princes of their lineage, studying how to make their priceless heritage blossom as the rose for their children's children, ay, and the oppressed of all lands.

Each of those men was sovereign ; in each throbbed and bounded the pulses of regal power ; each was of royal mettle he inherited directly from the King of kings, and owned no vassalage nor uncovered his head to any, save God alone.

In the dusky dawn Mrs. Lane bade John good-by through some tears that would fall, despite her resolute will ; and from the driver's seat by Mr. Marden he looked sorrowing back to her, and from her to the hills beyond her with terrible heart-ache for one he could not see.

CHAPTER XXII

AT HOME

THE next Sabbath, when Mr. Wilson drove into the yard from meeting, 'Lisbeth sat beside him, holding Dorothy. While the peaked wagon was lumbering up to the broad, flat doorstone, Mrs. Wilson discovered a new expression, an intangible shadow, apparent rather to her heart than sense, which had come over her child since she gayly rode away to Plymouth.

Mr. Wilson had confided nothing to his wife. She only felt 'Lisbeth was not exactly 'Lisbeth.

She could not kiss her child, for Mr. Wilson frowned on such endearments. She simply said, "How be you, 'Lisbeth? come right in. Tom will take your things up to your room."

"Why, mother," laughed the girl, "am I a stranger? —company invited to supper? Tom better run upstairs, though, for father says Lettice is gone visiting. Good-afternoon, grandma."

"How be ye, 'Lisbeth?" responded that elect dame, with a victorious wag of cap-border — Mr. Wilson had counselled with *her*.

"Where was the text, 'Lisbeth?" asked her grandmother. The girl paused; plainly her thoughts had wandered at church.

"Didn't you go tew meetin'?" she demanded severely.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Cur'us. Here's Tom. Le's see what he remembers. Tom, how many woodchuck skins are the Nutter boys tannin'?"

"Six," he cried, amazed and delighted.

"How do you know?"

"Counted 'em on the barn door."

"Where was the text?"

He quickly slunk out of the room; but she gave a piece of her mind to 'Lisbeth and Mrs. Wilson.

Mr. Wilson, coming in, paid no attention. He was so satisfied at John's departure nothing could ruffle him; but his mouth watered after a sinful fashion as he glanced at the table with the supper upon it.

As for 'Lisbeth, he concluded to himself on the way home that he should move very cautiously respecting Phil.

After prayers that evening, after all but her mother had gone to rest, 'Lisbeth brought a low stool to Mrs. Wilson's side, and sitting there recited the simple story of her love, the scene at Mr. Baker's, the command that she should marry Phil.

"Can you marry him, 'Lisbeth?"

"No, mother. You know what uncle said, and anyway, I could not. And, mother, you will not let them send me from home. Promise me, oh, promise me mother!"

The petition stirred Baker blood, and she replied spiritedly, but solemnly, —

"Hush, my daughter! God only shall take you from this house. Answer a good conscience to yourself and him, and may his peace remain with you for evermore."

Half an hour later 'Lisbeth fronted the little mirror in her room, holding a flickering candle in one hand, and pushing back her wavy hair with the other, and soliloquized, —

"What a funny old maid I shall be! 'Sharp as a hatchet,' or 'holding her own,' people will say. I will

not grow crabbed and twisted and mean-spirited, please God! It will make no difference how I look. I never shall seem ugly to mother and the children and Lettice. No one else will — oh!”

A terrible possibility confronted her. John would return once in a while — what then? Would he turn from her who relinquished the beatitudes of life for him? Would some young, fair girl trained in city graces walk up the stony road some twilight hour with him?

Would they two stand under the sweetbrier at the half-way mark, as he and she had done that perfect June day not quite six months ago? She was white from her own scourging hand, and moaned to herself, —

“There is but one path. O Thou who wast forsaken, help me to follow it!”

After a while hope returned; and she told herself her lover would not forget, no, he would not, and his years would keep even pace with hers. Then she spoke again to the figure in the glass, —

“I know one thing, Elizabeth Wilson; you will do your duty. There is to be no shirking nor shrinking from hard stents. This is not what you expected; but it is what you have, and you are to make the most of it. You are not going to be selfish, sitting down to hug a sorrow. You do not constitute the whole world, Elizabeth. Look around where others need care. Yes,” she said aloud, “this is my task, — faithful performance

of duty towards my friends, my family, and most of all, dear love, towards you and Him who made us all."

She went down-stairs next morning serene and self-possessed, and the boys followed with tales of beech-nutting, taming of colts from the pasture, trapping, and so on.

They were telling how their sled was iron-shod, so it would "go like a streak, clear to the medder brook," when a decided step came through the entry and some one opened the door.

"Why, Lettice!" they exclaimed.

"Mornin'," said she; "I've come home. Mr. Smart brought me, — he's goin' tew Plymouth tew court. Tried tew have him come in, but he couldn't, 'cause he's got tew be at Plymouth by nine o'clock. I've had a good spell of visitin', an' enjoyed it every minit."

"Is Lettice sick?" inquired the old lady.

"Sick? Land sakes, no! but it's growin' cold, an' I've warmed all the spare feather-beds from Hebron tew Bristol. I don't want no more on't; not at present."

She caught her bandbox by the twisted string of its coarse sack, and bustled to her room, returning soon, ready for work.

"I couldn't stay any longer no ways, 'Lisbeth, 'cause it's a'most time for you tew go tew the 'Cademy."

"I am not going."

"What?" She held the coffee-pot with one hand,

ready to put the coffee in, but dropped the measuring spoon back into the box. "What?"

"We want 'Lisbeth to home a while," remarked Mr. Wilson from the fireplace corner.

"Well I never! What air you goin' tew dew?"

"The flax and woollen rolls are ready for spinning, and I want to do it all; mother will trust me with the bird's-eye linen."

"Elizabeth Wilson! there's a web of bird's-eye for tablecloths, an' one for towels, as your mother calc'lates, full cloth for your father an' the boys, flannel for gowns, an' a frockin' web—nigh on tew hundred yards tew spin for, 'sides stockin' yarn; an' there's knittin' an' sewin'."

"We can knit and sew after my stent of spinning and weaving is done."

"You can't dew it, 'Lisbeth, never in this world."

"She may make a web of full cloth for the store, an' buy what she's a mind to with it," said the farmer.

"Oh, my, 'Lisbeth! buy me a jack-knife," whispered Jack.

She smiled less at him than from the fact that all roads to spare time were closed.

After prayers Lettice carried her own wheel into the east room, oiled and banded it, then brought an immense bundle of rolls pinned up in a checked blanket.

She pulled the thorn-pins out, and asked Mrs. Wilson how fine wool she intended 'Lisbeth should spin. Being

told, she selected a bunch of rolls of medium fine wool, put it on the roll-pin, fastened the blanket together, sent Tom up-stairs with it, and went to washing without another word; but her mind was busy as a bee. After dinner she looked into the east-room, saying, —

“My hard work is done, Mis’ Wilson, an’ I guess I’ll put a few little basketfuls of chip-dirt round the laylock roots, if you don’t care; they need it ’fore snow comes.”

Mrs. Wilson nodded, and she went out contentedly; for she felt something needed care, and half-bare roots were better than nothing to tend. When she heard of John’s departure she knew as well as if she had been told that an overturn of some sort had occurred, and it had more to do with her return than had chilly feather-beds. She still felt a puzzling but distinct change all round.

Finally she put shovel and basket by and went to Mrs. Wilson again.

“Mis’ Lane’s brother sent some things tew her by me, an’ I guess I’d better take ’em up now, so’s it’ll be done with.”

“I would,” replied Mrs. Wilson.

Lettice’s real errand to Mrs. Lane was to find out why John went away, and she did. Walking homeward she settled the question of her own duty all along the line of coming action.

Though an humble handmaid, she felt as responsible in her own sphere as did the town clerk and selectman

in theirs, and had no more idea of shirking it than they had. Supper was nearly ready when she reached home.

"I'm late, Mis' Wilson, an' there's nothin' I despise more'n bein' everlastingly behind. Fact is, Mis' Wilson, I've been larnin' my spellin's comin' home."

"I hope you can recite your lesson," smilingly said the gentle housemother.

"Yes, ma'am, I can, from baker to rhinoceros. Tew begin with, if 'Lisbeth's goin' tew have a stent, I'd better take one."

"See to something in particular?"

"Yes, ma'am. 'Sides common work I'll make the biled cider apple-sass an' candles, smoke the hams an' dry the beef, if you'd jest as soon."

"Very well, Lettice."

Thus it was settled. Spinning, weaving, knitting, and embroidery, as well as homelier toil, kept their minds above weak and plagueful meditations. Not that forgetfulness waited upon diligence, but that remembrance was healthy, sweet, and true. Care for others brought a benignant quiet, not of oblivion, but of patience, trust, and hope.

Before the south windows with the creamy rolls when it was sunshiny, facing the fire in foul weather, daily 'Lisbeth spun five skeins of even woollen yarn, or drew glossy flax from the distaff into fine thread for warp and woof of linen webs:

She sewed late afternoons, though sometimes, generally at Lettice's suggestion, she put on a pretty gown of dark red camlet or soft blue flannel, with dainty embroidered edge at neck and wrists, and paid a visit with her mother or Ruth Willard.

There were also a few late quiltings, and delightful sewing-bees, where she was indispensable as one who always knew when to run a seam and when to back-stitch it, and the very best width for fells and hems. She also laid gathers deftly, and was an authority on gussets.

Several crisp days she tramped beechnutting with the boys; or climbed the Pinnacle for white cudweed blooms that lasted all winter in pitchers on the fore room mantelpiece, or hunted the swamp for creamy scarlet bittersweet to twine with them. Her gladsome presence cheated the long winter evenings of weariness, as she sat beside her mother and the boys near the great fire, by a table on which a couple of candles winked and flickered, sewing, or drawing red yarn into shapely mittens with a bone hook. Often she read to the family from Goldsmith's *Greece* or *English History*, and to her father, specially, books of philosophy and biography. The *New Hampshire Patriot* and *State Gazette* reached Mr. Wilson once a week, bringing correct and well-sifted news. She read entire speeches on leading politics, the paper frequently printing both sides of an important question, while the firelight sheen danced

'mong her wavy tresses, and the spirit of national discussion reddened her cheeks.

The polemical bent of that mightily equipped race was fully set forth many a time that winter in the east-room, when neighboring men and women dropped in to exchange opinions and courtesies.

Often an ox-sled on which a whole family rode, a pung, or a sleigh on low, wide runners, with back so high only the tops of hat and bonnet appeared above it, pulled into Mr. Wilson's dooryard, to the chiming of great bells strung around the horse's neck. They recognized approaching visitors by the pitch of bells, for no two strings were keyed alike and of the same size. Some weighed fully three-quarters of a pound, some less than half of that.

Company came in just after sundown two or three times a week. Visiting opened by talking over the price of hemlock, axe-helves, and so on among the men, and domestic matters among the women (after all news concerning neighbors had been repeated), gradually, but inevitably, leading up to discussion of politics, foreordination, and free will.

Mr. Wilson was the expounder of the "scheme of salvation," as he termed it. Aunt Seth was swift to answer Huldah Moses powerfully and pointedly; but among her own sect she did express doubts as to the wisdom of clerical control in temporal affairs, and fretted some over dogma.

There was a slight flavor of abolitionism abroad, and she leaned toward it just enough to spice debate.

One evening in early winter she and her husband came in a red pung and entered the house, healthful and bracing as a west wind. Toward nine o'clock, he and Mr. Wilson enjoyed quite an exciting skirmish, while she watched 'Lisbeth play fox and geese with Tom. She closed it by asserting:—

"This world is some like a set of picters, Mr. Wilson. We larn by what we see. I was readin' 'bout field work down South, in our children's jography. It seemed some puzzlin'; but when I turned the leaf an' see them negroes pictured pickin' cotton, why there 'twas."

"Picters ain't substance, Mis' Batchelder."

"No; but they stan' for it. Hobson's little gal was tew our house yesterday—you know her father abuses his family. I told her bime by she'd go tew her Father in heaven, an' I declare, the poor little critter was scairt a'most tew death. I thought then and there what a sight some of us must be tew our children."

Mrs. Batchelder had no idea of striking the grizzled farmer such a blow, but his soul ached as he noticed 'Lisbeth pale above the fox and geese board.

However, he bravely quoted Paul to the Corinthians as to parental authority and servants.

"Well," said she, "I hain't nothin' agin Paul, an' I should wish tew be so understood; but I guess if we

follored Paul's Master a little closer, we shouldn't walk quite so skewin' tew our childern. As tew this buyin' an' sellin' of husbands an' wives an' childern, p'raps its all foreordinated an' so tew be.

"Mebby them souls are some of his little ones larnin' their a-b-abs in a hard school, where they don't even own the skin on their backs. But we needn't set up little lights over it, they won't be wuth a piece of punk."

Lettice opened the door at that critical juncture, and invited them out to one of her very best cups of coffee. The boys lighted a candle, put it into a tin lantern, and went to the barn after the horse, which jogged away with the company shortly after nine o'clock.

CHAPTER XXIII

SPELLING-SCHOOL AND SUGARING-OFF

MR. WILSON remembered Aunt Seth's picture lesson. He made more evening visits with his wife and daughter. When Mr. Ward, late in March, came out to inspect the school, he invited 'Lisbeth to go with them to the schoolhouse, and her father heartily assented.

The boys hauled a sled-load of kitchen chairs beforehand for the use of the master's guests.

Pausing a moment at the schoolroom door, awaiting answer to their knock, they heard the order, —

“Rise.”

Mr. Page, the master, throwing the door wide open, disclosed the school standing with heads up and folded arms. Not a muscle of the squad moved, and every eye was fixed on the visitors. Mr. Page greeted Mr. Ward ceremoniously, then introduced him. “Scholars, our superintendent, Mr. Ward.” The strangely draped statuary dropped its arms and bowed low.

“Mr. Wilson.”

Another, but less reverential bow. The master spoke a confused good-afternoon to 'Lisbeth in plaid cloak and pink-lined hood as she passed quietly in.

“Be seated, scholars.”

Mr. Ward was critic, schoolmaster, friend, and pastor. The children of the town regarded him with great love and veneration. He tested the knowledge of each child carefully, and there was no sting in his reproof. He believed, as did all men, that schools were fundamental, the upholders of religion and conservators of the State. There was a settled conviction that if free government founded on free conscience failed, ignorance would strike it down. Hence arose the scrupulous training of future men and mothers of men.

“In what order will you make the examination?” inquired Mr. Page.

“Let the school read the morning Bible lesson.”

"Turn to the twentieth chapter of Matthew. Commence, Francis."

A scholarly young man on the back seat rose, and reverently read the first verse, then sat down, and so on in regular order, to those who could only spell out the sacred words.

"Class in geography."

Girls mostly came into the floor and toed the mark.

Grammar called out the oldest pupils; but arithmetic brought the entire school into the floor.

Mr. Page sounded the "a" in arithmetic before Mr. Ward, though on off days he might have dropped it.

Beginners soon went to their seats; but Mr. Ward drilled the Colburn's Arithmetic and ciphering contingent for an hour. Then the master said,—

"You may have recess. Bring your copy-books to the desk as you go by."

Each pupil on reaching the door faced around and made a droll bow of courtesy, entering in similar fashion when they heard Mr. Page's butternut ruler upon the window. The time after recess was occupied by Mr. Ward, who, rising, invited Phil, the committeeman from his own district, to make remarks. Phil looked at 'Lisbeth, pulled at his vest buttons, and shook his head. Mr. Ward criticised, encouraged, related anecdotes, and finally added, "Let us pray." Immediately after prayers Mr. Page said,—

"Remember spelling-school to-night. You're dismissed."

Mr. Wilson invited Squire Hoyt and his wife, Mrs. Lane, Mrs. Oliver Kidder, the master, and Phil home to supper; and they all returned at candlelight. A great fire-roared up the chimney, and the room was full of boys and girls who had brought their supper and stayed at the schoolhouse till evening.

Bart Lane and Eunice, standing on opposite chairs, clasped hands across, and repeated in unison, —

“Lift the king’s gate as high as the sky,
And let the king and his train pass by ;”

while an endless chain of red-cheeked lads and lassies walked laughing through, till the gate should fall, imprisoning a pair. The children’s seat was full of “button, button” players, and the game had reached the laughing, pouting, and altogether wild stage of forfeits.

The king’s gate had fallen, when upon the full-throated laughter came a terrible hush; for the entry door opened, and there behind the master, whose roguish smile only induced bashfulness, strode Mr. Wilson, clad in official dignity, and hating levity. Very quietly, yet with mirthsome glances at safe angles, the iron candlesticks, bearing lighted candles, were placed on desks, sides were chosen, Mr. Wilson reproved them for lightness of demeanor, and they spelled glibly till recess. Afterward Mr. Page invited Phil to select a

partner and choose sides. Without a second's hesitation he threaded the densely packed floor to 'Lisbeth.

"Will you choose with me?"

"Thank you, yes," and she smilingly followed, one and another of the young men whispering as she passed, "Choose me first, 'Lisbeth."

Phil was proud and confident and gracious.

"Choose first, 'Lisbeth." Half a dozen raised their hands.

"Richard Sleeper." Dick Sleeper was a handsome, splendidly endowed young man, cousin to the Lane boys and John Mayhew, and was then teaching in the Hoyt district, earning money for expenses at Hanover, from whence he would graduate at the next commencement. He was also Ruth's lover; but that was not to be common news till he graduated: only Ruth's nearest friend, 'Lisbeth, knew it. Coming up, he whispered, under cover of cheers for his luck, "Thankee, 'Lisbeth; choose Ruth."

Phil heard the whisper, and was jealous, seeing 'Lisbeth nod and smile.

"Another college feller," he complained, before the cheers subsided. She only urged, —

"Your choice, quick!"

"Ruth Willard." Dick bit his lip, but saw the point.

"We will have speaking first," said Mr. Page. "Those ready to speak will come to the desk."

The first was a declamation, and "Live or die, sur-

vive or perish," was well spoken; for the incense of Revolutionary sacrifice was in the air, and potent still.

After him boys in spencers presented "The Peruvian" to general satisfaction.

"Our next piece is a short dialogue," said Mr. Page; and two tittering girls pushed in from the entry, bit their lips, mumbled a few words, giggled again, and ran out, upsetting the shovel and tongs in their flight.

Then a boy eight years old started bravely to recite "A Spanish Poem." He commenced, —

"Life is a sea; how fair its face!"

There he stopped short, but pretty soon began again, —

"Life is a sea — a sea" — At that point he put both hands behind him, and appeared a little seasick.

"Life is, — life" — and he caught grim hold of his spencer buttons to prevent growing worse; then he braced himself with all his might, dropped his arms resolutely by his side, and made a determined effort, —

"Life is a sea; how fair its face!

How smooth its dimpling water's pace,"

"pace — pace — dimpling water's — dimple — dimple — dim — dim — m-m-m-m —" ending in a heart-broken sob as he covered his eyes, and his sturdy little boots went bump, bump, to a seat, every thud arousing in the older boys memories of a time when their own boot-heels had wakened similar echoes.

"Now," said Uncle Seth, "I should like tew hear one thing more"—he spoke while the master was patting Billy, and telling him he would do first-rate next time,—"now, I should like tew hear Dick Sleeper speak the 'Declaration of Independence.' Ev'ry gal ought tew know it, an' ev'ry boy needs to larn it same as he would how tew handle an axe or a hoe."

There was a chorus of "Yes, yes" from men and women. Dick had been saying pleasant nothings to girls near by; but instantly the roguish boy vanished, and a strong youth, obedient to his elders, stepped manfully down the aisle, into the floor, and pronounced the stately periods of that wondrous instrument with all the fervor of youthful enthusiasm and the finish of established schools. Much stress was laid upon elegant public speaking. Eloquence was common. Freedom and oppression are the prolific gardens of expression.

The mightier the moving force which demands skilful phrases, the stronger does utterance move that ineffable faculty called oratory. Dick satisfied the audience, returned amid cheers, and spelling began briskly, continuing for half an hour then Mr. Page requested the school to rise for the final spelling-down. Moderately hard words were put out to begin with, increasing in difficulty, till but four were standing on 'Lisbeth's side, Phil and Ruth alone on his.

"I'll make one more venture," said Mr. Hull, an old

schoolmaster. "It is a compound word. Abel-beth-maachah."

It created consternation. Francis first pronounced according to custom.

"That is correct—spell," three times he essayed. "Wrong,—pronounce it and sit down."

He made up in waggerly what he lacked in knowledge, saying quickly with a superb dignity natural as his breath.

"Abel-bid-me-take-her." The rafters rang with merriment. "Next," was finally heard. All went down but Ruth, who had been spelling Bible names to a maiden aunt for fun.

Dick whispered, "Ruth, I am ashamed of you," which so disconcerted her that she missed the very next word.

"That will do. This district, and Mr. Harmon's side, win. The last spelling-school this year will be at the Hoyt schoolhouse Monday evening at early candle-light. You are dismissed."

Phil jerked his waistcoat down, pulled his collar up, patted his necktie, settled his white-fringed woollen wristers, but to no purpose. No amount of fixing or fussing could "screw his courage to the sticking point;" so 'Lisbeth slipped away without his saying "May I see you home?" When next he saw her she and Martha Hoyt were, hand in hand, sliding down schoolhouse hill on their heavy shoes.

While the folks were putting on their wraps, Mrs.

Lane invited them to a sugaring-off a week from the next Thursday evening. Snow and ice were melting, stirring suns hurried maple juices from warm roots up through woody veins and arteries to quicken waiting buds, and roadside rivulets ran babbling to the meadow brook that Thursday evening of the party, when Jack and Tom helped the Lane boys do their chores.

They brought sap yokes, which were made of logs scooped out thin with adze and gouge to fit their shoulders. The yoke-arms were thick twigs trimmed to hooked ends upon which hung the pails. The upper ends were fastened to the yoke by leather thongs.

Mr. Lane's maples were on a hillside. Sweet-elder spiles, driven into augur holes bored in the trees, dropped the sap into ashen troughs, which the boys emptied into pails, and cautiously picked their way down the slippery ledgy path to the dooryard, where they poured it into a half hogshead that stood beside the fire.

Above the flames a heavy pole on crotched sticks held up two great iron kettles, and in them the sap seethed and hissed, boiling down to sirup.

Before the boys brought their last bucketful, the Lane house was filled with a confused "How be ye," "Good eve'nin'," and "I'm glad to see you."

The young men immediately began to whittle out chisel-shaped sticks, "spuds," for their sweethearts and themselves, not forgetting their mothers or even the old maids. Louisa and some girls put cheese, pickles, plates

of doughnuts, and pans full of snow pounded hard, upon the table.

Mrs. Lane swung a pailful iron kettle now over, now away, from the steady maple-chip blaze, as the sirup within rose and fell, at first in tiny wavelets, then it gently puffed through its creamy foam. She tried it moment by moment with a spoon. When the sirup dropped from it in waxy threads, it was ready for spuds and snow; when it fell brittly, it was sugar.

At last Mrs. Lane turned her head on one side, puckered her mouth quaintly, and said, —

“Loizy, this is real waxy. See what you think, Mis’ Wilson.”

“It is nice for spuds and snow, Mis’ Lane.”

“Hello, Dick! how’ll you have it?” called Francis.

“What is it ready for?”

“Spuds.”

“Then I prefer spuds.”

He thrust some deep into the amber froth, twirled them rapidly to cool them as he ran out, shouting back, —

“Come, Ruth and Eunice.”

Mrs. Lane ladled part of the sirup into a crock, and said, —

“Francis, you and Tom carry this out, then there’ll be all the dooryard to run ’round in.”

The elder people dipped from the kettle with a little gourd, and poured it over the snow, let it cool to a brittle paste, then broke it into toothsome bits.

Jollity stole in from outside where a half-grown moon sifted gems on ragged ice-fields, and its placid rays fell upon merry maids and youths gathered in knots by the fire, or running to snatch a delicious stick, or wandering in happy pairs along the shimmering road.

Phil invited 'Lisbeth to a seat on the wood-pile's western side, half withdrawn from their companions. It looked significant, he thought; quite like waiting upon her home. After a while he went in for a pan. While he was absent, Huldah came out and spoke confidentially to Eunice, who was out of sight, but within earshot of 'Lisbeth.

"I heard a queer story 'bout John, Tuesday."

"What was it?"

Huldah sighed deeply.

"What ails you, Huld' Moses? Stop sithin'! For the land's sake, what is it?"

"It don't come from me, but I s'pose he's begun his flirtations."

Eunice grew pale; for if the story were true, who could tell but 'Lisbeth might accept Phil out of spite, and he was dear to her. She inquired eagerly, —

"Who is she? Where'd he find her?"

"I heard her name; Rose Standish Quincy. No findin' at all. He went to Boston 'long of her brother."

"Why, Huld' Moses!"

"Yes; brother took him home, an' then he kep' goin' an' goin', an' there 'tis."

"My stars! How did you hear, Huldý?"

"I went tew Bristol Tuesday, tew cook for a raisin'. Phœbe Glines works at Bristol tahvern, an' she says two awful high-steppin' chaps drove up Monday an' called for dinner. When they was tew the table, one says, 'John Mayhew grow'd 'roun' here,' an' t'other he says, 'Yes; we left Rose in his care, didn't we?' Phœbe tells by the way they looked, that John acts softer'n a piece of putty. One man's name was Quincy, an' she thinks they was brothers; tenerate, she see a letter they backed, Rose Standish Quincy."

"Writ all out like that?"

"Yes. I tole Phœbe it seemed dretful fussy. Nobody would go canterin' off with it, if they'd writ Rose S."

Dick and Ruth, whispering foolishness at the end of the pile, heard it, and he whispered, —

"Look after Phil when he comes out. I must see to 'Lisbeth."

He danced gayly to her, saying, —

"Phil cannot expect you to watch the moon all night. Come, let's slide down the garden wharfing."

He caught her by the hand, and they were over the slope before she quite understood. He told her, —

"I heard Huldah's yarn. It's a lie, 'Lisbeth, a lie! That Glines woman does not know one thing about it."

He heartened her, and in a few moments they climbed the bank, Dick immediately calling, —

"It's time to parch corn."

Outsiders trooped into the kitchen. Louisa brushed the hearth clean to a bank of glowing embers. Dick and Eunice, Phil and Ruth, furnished with long forked sticks, sat around the fireplace. They opened furrows in the embers, threw the shelled corn in, and waited till pop, pop, flew the milk-white kernels in all directions, being finally landed on the cool bricks by their deftly handled rods.

Francis and 'Lisbeth gathered the mealy morsels into plates, and moistened them with fast cooling maple sirup.

At nine o'clock they started homeward. Huldah's chatter had reached Phil's ear, and he was very talkative, having made up his mind anew that he should marry 'Lisbeth.

He made no attempt to escort her home, because he thought it over while parching corn, and concluded to adopt other methods.

The stories would creep around; Huldah would see to that, and he would finally propose, when between 'Lisbeth's injured pride and her father's commands, success would be sure.

CHAPTER XXIV

BARN-RAISING

A FEW weeks later, 'Lisbeth, walking home from the post-office, saw Phil waiting by his pasture bars. He had started, axe on shoulder, to mend some fences, but bethought himself of an excuse to go home with her.

"I'm goin' up to see if your father will put some of our young stock into his mountain pasture. How's your folks?"

"We are well, thank you. How are yours?"

"Mother's kinder mis'able." She was struck by his unusual gentle anxiety.

"Nothing serious, I hope."

"She works too hard, mother does. Got a letter?" He saw one in her hand, and it fretted him.

"For Mrs. Moses. I'm going to leave it at the King's."

He let the bars down at Mr. King's lane very politely, and they walked up, to find Mrs. King with her husband and son in the woodshed swingling and hatchelling flax. Her son broke stalks with strong, lazy blows from a wooden swingling-knife, while his father pulled the broken stems through a hatchel, or set of iron teeth set in a thick plank, which shredded the coarse parts

from the fine, leaving finally a long wisp of silky flax. The old hunter smiled grimly as they approached, and bantered the youth.

"Want a job, Phil? Then jest take this hatchel. I'm sick on't. I'd ruther set on a log an' watch frogs pull outen the mud."

"I hain't a doubt on't, David; but you can't be tired," half fretted the dame.

"I ain't; that's jest it. A body might stan' by this hatchellin'-comb tew all 'tarnity, an' 'twouldn't wear on 'em a morsel. Huh! what's that?"

He jumped across to a sheltered spot behind the watering-trough, where some early violets peeped up through humid leaves. He bent over them, waving a hand backward to quiet the dogs. Suddenly he said, —

"It's a bee, true as preachin'!"

"Yes," said Mrs. King calmly; "they've been a-flyin' in an' out our hives for more'n a week."

"'Tain't outen our hives, Nabby. It's a wile one, a wile bee, mother!" he shouted, waving his old hat around his head.

"We ain't deaf, David." Her voice was pretty tart. "An' what if 'tis a wile one? I guess it'll git erlong if you don't up an' chase it 'fore it's half thawed out."

"But I must find the swarm."

"David, you act like sixty, caperin' all over the woods for one bee. Who's goin' tew dew this combin'?"

"The gals; 'tain't hard. Hello, Mary! Here, come, mother wants you. I'm off for the honey, Nabby."

The odd reproof of face and pose as she held a bunch of tow half raised, her head on one side with a kind of picturesque criticism, and the untutored sarcasm of her answer, were inimitable.

"Honey! Honey! Prob'ly he's filled a holler tree chuck-full outen that little half-froze vilet."

The King's eyes twinkled solemnly.

"Mebbe t'ain't runnin' over this minit; but I'm goin' tew blaze the tree 'gin fall. Come along, pups. Gimme the letter; no, put it up behind the comb-case." That settled it; and he trotted woodsward, allowing his wife to comb out the flax, or leave her distaff unbonnetted, while Phil and 'Lisbeth went up through the pasture, and orchard home, to the utter consternation of Lettice, who was making pies by the well-room window.

"Lordy! It can't be," she said aloud when she saw them; "'tis — well, if I ain't beat!" With one hand on a hip, and the other on the table, she leaned toward the window and further soliloquized, —

"My soul and body! that's curus, awful curus! He's laffin' an' talkin' — butter wouldn't melt in his mouth — he's been so a sight lately, an' it's the funniest th — O Mis' Wilson, how you scairt me!"

"Who are you talking to, Lettice?"

"Myself; I'm tryin' tew make these punkin pies, an' I've lost the rollin'-pin — here 'tis under the mixin'-

bowl. I can't tell whether I've salted this pie-stuff or not; you taste."

"It is very nice, Lettice."

"Then I'll put the things together, an' bake 'em 'fore I forgit where the oven is."

She returned a very short nod to Phil's good-natured, "How be ye, Lettice?"

"He's personable 'nuff, but he hain't never been halter broke. Eunice could train him, an' I wish she had him this minit," was her mental comment as she heard him bargain for pasturing stock.

"I s'pose you'll all be up to the Kidder raisin," Phil said just as he was going out.

"Likely we shall; barn's a sixty footer, so it'll take all the men to lift, an' the women to cook an' look on," replied Mr. Wilson.

Lettice came in to the oven, and Phil asked, "Goin' to cook for the Kidder raisin'?"

"Spect likely; Mis' Kidder spoke tew me quite a spell ago."

When he was fairly out-doors Lettice sent a comical glance after him, observing, —

"I'm beat; that is a solemn fact."

"Why?" inquired Mrs. Wilson.

"'Cause I am."

Lettice hummed and scowled a good deal for a few days; but she was early and chipper at Mrs. Kidder's raising-day morning, assisting the housewife.

"I'll take the brunt of cookin, Mis' Kidder," she said; "you jest put on your good cap, an' pin a black silk handkercher round your neck, an' see tew us."

"I'd better lay out the tablecloths 'fore I dress up. The men have put boards on high horses in the cheese-room; makes a nice long table."

"Yes; hold sixty, I persoom. The gals better set it right off, for we all want tew see that barn go up."

By nine o'clock the whole male population from round-about was whittling on the garden wall, or walking around the great skeleton that lay prone upon the ground beyond it. Mr. Odlin, the carpenter, gazed with laudable pride on those great timbers prepared by weeks of patient toil with axe and saw, square and line, adze and chisel.

He despised no helpful suggestions which those men of trained eyes and judgment chose to make.

Dreadful accidents befell even carefulest framing; and he was glad to have them prove dimensions, and see that great wooden pins and wedges were secure.

"Seems tew me that j'ist is a grain long;" and Mr. Odlin would carefully re-measure.

"This brace-pin would stan' a leetle more drivin';" and sturdy blows from beetle or axe-head made it sure.

He went behind them all, making certain that joints were fastened, minding if the deep mortises in the enormous rills were exactly in line with the waiting tenons, testing by the square as he went along.

"Anything more, Mr. Wilson?"

"Not as I see."

"All ready!"

The tone was strong, rather than loud, but self-reliant and commanding. Shutting knife-blades clicked, hats and coats were thrown off, and the men gathered, silent and determined.

Mr. Odlin stationed known strong and reliable persons at the corner and centre posts; others held huge iron bars laid on the mortise edge to guide the tenons into place. Phil was at the north post. Half a dozen quick athletes were reserved for exigency, some with bars, some without. The rest were put along the plate, or evenly disposed among the timbers.

From then till the enormous framework rose in air they obeyed but one,—the master workman; one law obtained,—instant, concerted obedience.

"Take a long breath, men, and start easy. Are you ready?"

For answer each grasped what prostrate timber lay at his feet.

"Now, then, take it up—slow—steady—now she rises—stronger at the centre—ease off on the north post—lift, lift! Heave at the north! Take hold there!" turning to his reserve. An awful quiver ran through the half-raised frame. Though the lifting had been very slightly uneven, yet it had warped the north post so no joint could be made.

Phil stood there, tense as steel, with bar braced against that frightful weight, an only hope to those bent and strained beneath that shivering burden.

In that decisive moment Mr. Odlin was calm, swift, certain.

“Put two bars with Harmon’s! Quick! Two men go to the centre; the rest take hold on the south end!”

They obeyed. Then he said quietly to those bent like saplings, “Hold a minit, men; hold hard.” Then cheerily called, —

“Are you right there, Harmon?”

“Ay!”

“Once more; altogether now!”

A wrestler would have gloried in the corded, compact sinews shown in arm, shoulder, back, and leg, as the bowed mass knitted to straighten, and overcome the inertia of that dead weight.

“Good!” cried Mr. Odlin. “It moves; it’s goin’ up. Ha, that’s it—once more—altogether. Hea-ee-ee-ee-ve.”

A heavy thud, thud of tenons striking the deep mortise beds sounded all along the sill. Thankful murmurs rose from the group of women in the dooryard, who soon were bringing pails of steaming coffee to husband and sons. Compliments were showered upon Phil, not in iterated phrases so much as by a few words fitly spoken; for those people were strangely provident of praise. He looked for two who came not.

When Eunice saw the side sway into place, and heard the clang of falling bars, she ran to the far shed, where 'Lisbeth found her cooling her swollen eyes. Going in to dinner, Phil received a few bright words from 'Lisbeth, but talkative Eunice was silent.

After the meal, boarding the barn, smoking, stories, and finally the antics of some who had imbibed too much New England rum, put it out of his mind. Lettice asked him to help take the witless men in.

"Are you a Washingtonian, Lettice?"

"Good land! I hope not. What is it?"

"A new-fangled notion for stoppin' rum-drinkin'."

"For a fact?"

"Yes."

"An' for good an' all?"

"Yes."

"Well," said she firmly, "then I'm it; an' I don't care a cent what it looks like."

"Mebby it'll die out, Lettice."

"If sech a thing as you speak on is sprouted, it'll live, Phil; live an' grow. Nobody nor nothin' can kill it, for it's rooted in sufferin' hearts, an' watered with bitterer tears than you ever dreamt on."

Phil by his own fireside that evening thought it over to himself.

"Queer that jest as I held what 'peared tew me the very last ounce, an' that post crawlin' nearer an' nearer, I give one look to the house, an' see mother leanin' over

tryin' to help, an' Eunice an' 'Lisbeth white as snow. I knew I'd got to hold, an' I did. When I went in everybody said more'n 'Lisbeth, an' Eunice never spoke. It's dumb funny! Why didn't Eunice come round to our side of the table? She shied it like a colt. What ailed her, anyway? She's a girl. I s'pose that accounts for it. If there's funnier critters than girls in this wide world I don't want to see 'em."

Then his mind wandered to Lettice.

"I guess they're all alike, girls an' women. Lettice keeps a middlin' stiddy jog, — but by George! how she did cut up over them sots! She was real han'some, though, kinder lookin as if she see kingdom come."

He lighted a candle and went up-stairs, thinking he should settle matters with 'Lisbeth; and the evening after he did.

How he presented his suit or she received it none ever knew. She spun next day with a lightsome song; and the Harmons simply knew their son had dressed in his freedom coat, gone out, returned early, and was surly at breakfast. His mother was worried; but Mr. Harmon explained, —

"He's all right Abbygil, — a leetle touch of spring weather; fencin'll cure him."

But at night he was fain to say he missed his guess.

Phil did not mind it so much at the time, for he was kindly smiled out of Mr. Wilson's; but to think over and look back upon it was a pretty wearing subject.

By the end of the week he concluded upon a plan whereby he might assert his importance, and let the neighbors understand they had misled themselves. It resulted from a habit of running his meditations from 'Lisbeth to Eunice. She was a nice girl, had fire and spirit; yes, and come to think of it she was pretty too.

Eunice would like to go to his cousin's barn-raising at Hebron the next week, why not invite her?

That afternoon while whistling jovially behind the plough, he saw the Batchelder horse come over Brainard hilltop, and jog staidly towards him, reined by Eunice.

"By George!" he exclaimed, "Hish, Star, back, Bright, whoa, — hish-sh-sh."

The panting black oxen stood still mid-furrow, while he skipped lightly away to the road and waited with one foot on the middle rail of a fence.

"Hello, Eunice."

"How be ye, Phil? Here's some papers for your folks an' the Smiths."

"Thankee; where've ye been?"

"To Bristol, doin' store errands for mother. I've had lots of fun." How cheerily she laughed.

"Did you, what about?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Heard any news?"

"No-o; only Rob Fowler on the Alexandry road is cap'n, an' he'll come out May trainin'."

Rob Fowler had strayed to their side of the pond several times, and Phil disliked him as well as a recountal of his honors.

"I must be goin'," said she, pulling up the bridle rein.

"See here, Eunice, can't you stop a second?"

"I'm in a hurry."

"Do hold on. There's a raisin' over to Hebron next Wednesday."

"You goin'?"

"Yes, an' I shall be pleased to take you, Eunice."

There! It was done. He had invited her according to rules and regulations in such cases made and provided. Eunice felt much like galloping away; but how could she with a frolic in prospect, so adapted to her brilliant, every-day beauty.

Besides, she would be proud to go with him, for his bravery at Mr. Kidder's was heralded about; so what was there to answer, as she flicked the budding maples, only,—

"I should like to go if mother is willin'."

"Horseback?"

"Which way you like."

"Horseback then bright and early."

How delightful she was that crisp spring morning, as she bounded to the saddle; and as they cantered along he watched her strong pretty face change to glowing color in her deep pink bonnet, and noted with what firm,

delicate muscles the horse was reined. He was really seeing for the first time a girl he had loved since she went to school. He recollected how restless she was, and that her little hands were smitten with a stinging hemlock bough because she could not sit still. Almost he reached to take them for pity of that earlier day. At the raising he grew proud, minding how she moved among the maidens; and felt blest in her quiet comradeship, riding home in evening's benignant dusk. It was lonesome after he turned homeward from her father's, and the saddle looked desolate. He was so busy thinking that he passed the Wilson house unheeding, not dreaming that he had carried misery within its door that day.

CHAPTER XXV

AT MR. WILSON'S

'LISBETH saw the happy couple coming down school-house hill that morning, and loitered at her spinning-wheel to watch them passing by. While she idled, her father at the sheep-barn flung the doors together angrily and made straight to her. Mrs. Wilson's ball of yarn she was doubling fell to the floor when she saw him.

"Did you see them, 'Lisbeth?" he asked fiercely.

"Yes, sir."

"How happens it?"

"May I speak to you alone, father?"

"No; you need to be 'shamed, you wicked, disobedient child. You're going to undo this sinful deed, an' that quick, too, or I'll know the reason why!"

"How?"

"You sent him away, now bring him back!"

"Father!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilson.

"Tend to your yarn, Marthy, an' not interfere 'tween me an' mine."

The girl felt righteously angered, and respectfully demanded, —

"Who gave me to you, and why? Are you answering your own obligation?"

No hidden tremor quavered in one syllable of that clearly spoken question. As for candor and intrepid spirit, she was tuned to one key with him.

He was dumb before her. He expected tears, but not that manner; yet he felt distinctly proud of her, as he met the full light of those steadfast eyes and that serenely dominant face, almost at even height with his own. His rocky pride was reflected there, but controlled by the more judicial, kingly temper that marked her mother's race. Before he recovered himself she again asked, —

"Who gave me to you, and why?"

He grew fiercer still. She questioned him — she, who was a baby yesterday! He would let her know!

"Do you persoom to chatechize me? Well, you're to be warmed, fed, an' taken care of, for which you are to be subject to parental authority an' foller my judgment till you are married."

"Not quite so, father, because you might command what would be sin to me. You were held till my conscience was instructed, but not now. At the final reckoning I must speak for myself. So therefor and thereto I must shape my life."

"You shape your life! Humph! Remember that evening at your uncle's. Did you hear what I said then?"

"Yes, sir."

"'Spect me to change my mind?"

"I fear not."

"Elizabeth, I will not; you are goin' to make a sharp turn an' bring Phil back."

"Father!"

"Not another syllable, not one" —

Lettice's mud shoes pattered in through the entry so heavily as to interrupt Mr. Wilson. She hummed merrily, her large bonnet shutting out the scene upon which she entered, as she called attention to a small basket heaped with dandelions.

"See here, ain't these nice? I went both sides of the road most tew Mis' Lane, an' now I guess there ain't 'nuff for a mess 'thout piecin' out with mustard. Who do you think I see? Phil an' Eunice — fairly did me

good, they was so happy; an' its percisely as the Lord intended, I hain't a doubt."

She set the basket on the table, and threw a stick on the fire, before Mr. Wilson could find a point to thunder out, —

"Lettice!"

Down bumped a second stick.

"Good land! how you scairt me. You needn't take my head off. What's the matter?"

One glance at the ascendant cap-border jerking encouragement towards Mr. Wilson, another at his frightened wife and 'Lisbeth, disclosed the matter.

"Knowed it quicker 'n a wink," she said afterwards.

"Presumption! you don't know divine plans."

"That's a fact. I said mor'n I ort tew, but no more dew you an' " —

"Lettice, stop."

"I'm goin' tew say my say. You don't know nothin' 'bout it, nor I nuther, so we're even; an' all our little lights are dim 'sides one that's allus burnin', Mr. Wilson, — jest one — that is love, an' God is love, an' that's his light."

He glared at her, and kicked a fallen brand into the fire, remarking, —

"We're goin' to turn over a new leaf, Lettice."

"A good idee — very; I would if I was you, an' could."

"Could ! could !"

"Yes ; depends on the leaf. Some weigh mor'n others. A maple one might rustle down an' you'd skurcely sense it, but" —

"I am talkin' of a leaf of conduct, Lettice."

"So I s'posed. Well, you've tackled the heftiest one of all, but I hain't done nothin' wuss 'n pick some greens."

"You know better, Lettice. You three women have schemed and contrived agin my authority."

"O Thomas !" pleaded his frightened wife.

"It is true, Marthy ; upholdin' that gal yender till she flings her head higher 'n an unbroken colt, despisin' duty."

"I never did no sech thing nor thought on 't," sturdily claimed the handmaiden. "'Lisbeth ort tew dew her duty 'thout shirkin', let it come back or aige ; but she must tackle her own stint, not somebody else's."

Lisbeth had been gazing upon the pond, jewelled beneath the spring sun. At that point she broke into Lettice's vigorous speech.

"Father, I should like to do, as Lettice has said, my duty."

"Well," said he, wishing he had gone into the fore-room, "it's easy 'nuff ; tell me, have you refused Philip Harmon ?"

"I have."

"Knowin' he had my promise ?"

"Yes, sir," she smiled pitifully; "but was not mine necessary?"

"I don't consider that it was or is. Why did you refuse him?"

She grew pale and clutched a chair, but said eagerly, —

"Father, he does not care."

"We ain't talkin' of his side. Speak for yourself."

"Because I could not like him — so."

Her maidenly sense was affronted, and slow sparks gleamed and died in her eyes while speaking. Mr. Wilson kept his temper, for he discerned that so lay the only likelihood of controlling that tranquilly belligerent child.

"Why? Pick out a likelier young man than he is. Well-lookin', well-behaved, and got faculty. He has a first-rate farm, house, an' stock, an' every shingle, field, an' hoof his own."

"He doesn't want me to help him take care of it."

"Don't tell *me*. Faultin' Phil don't bridge no brooks, nor keep my word. S'posen he was John Mayhew?"

She hesitated.

"You'd marry *him* in a minit, if you was let be. Why?"

She never faltered; but a roseate blush suffused her cheek as she replied, —

"Because I love him."

"Pshaw! he never'll come back; you can settle on that."

He could not understand the happiness of living sure of a love that, making no sign, still ran on an harmonious undersong in the melody of life. He continued, —

“We’ve cleared the well, an’ he comes up in the last bucketful. ’Lisbeth !”

“I am sorry to grieve you.”

“I ain’t grieved. I’m ’shamed as a dog. I s’pose you’ll turn Methodist’ ’fore long. You an’ your mother an’ Lettice a-carryin’ on an’ shoutin’ with the rest.”

’Lisbeth surveyed the mountain-tops beyond the pond before replying, —

“If they believe everybody has a fair chance for heaven, no wonder they shout.”

“Heresy ! heresy in my house ! Heresy brought to my door by John Mayhew, curse him ! Reprobate, and son of reprobate, non-elect and foreordained to perdition !”

“Here, Mr. Wilson, wait a jiffy !” exclaimed Lettice, jumping up with a knife in one hand and a dandelion root in the other. “He don’t act like a critter of that kind, not a mite. Markin’ souls for the Lord is skeery business. S’posen John should turn round and pick you out for wrath ? I guess there’d be some squirmin’.”

“Go back tew your greens, Lettice, an’ keep still.”

She obeyed, after giving him another piece of her mind with her sharp eyes, and ’Lisbeth resumed, —

“Supposing it is foreordained that I shall never marry, what can you do, father ?”

"Make sure no chances are thrown away. A gardeen will be provided. You must ask Phil back."

"Me! Ask him! I cannot."

"Sech pride needs breakin'. If you can't, I can."

"Don't, father; don't. Let me stay here, for you will need me as Lettice grows older."

"And marry John Mayhew finally? No!"

"I promise never to marry without your consent; but don't drive me away. Mother needs me, and I will be as faithful as a dog."

"Nothin' will change my mind. I shall see Phil myself, and tell him the whole story. You needn't worry, for we can manage it; but you will marry him before snow flies."

"Ask him to marry me!"

"He asked me long ago."

"Am I to be sold like one of the cattle? Bargained for no price at all, but given, in fact, to a neighbor's son, as if I had no soul."

"Bargain an' trade are hard sayin's. I only hold him to his promise, and keep mine."

"Father, I cannot marry Philip Harmon! Do you hear, I cannot!"

He was very pitiless and stern.

"Elizabeth Wilson, you certainly will!"

"Think the matter over a day, only one day, father."

"Not an hour, nor minit; no time at all."

"Then hear me: I never will marry Philip Harmon."

"What! will not?"

"I will not!"

His temper grew to white heat. "Elizabeth, you must! Do you understand, — must!"

She fronted him deferentially, yet the frown between her brows answered before she spoke.

"Father, I have ever honored you, and though your faith has seemed harsh, it has been mine; I do not see as it gives you such power over me. If I have come to discretion which allows marriage, I have to what is necessary in the selection of a husband. My conscience distinctly opposes your proposition, therefore, profoundly respecting parental authority, and desiring to follow sacred precepts carefully, duty to myself compels me to say I cannot, dare not, will not, marry this man Philip Harmon."

"I want to know." The sarcasm wounded like a scourge. "Well and good; may I ask what your ladyship expects to do?"

"Stay at home, and show that in everything but this I am obedient to the letter."

"Spitin' authority makes you a stranger; this is not your home any more."

"Father!"

"An unwelcome stranger at that. Go!"

"You send me away? Me! Away! You will kill me."

"We've come to a sorry day for all on us, but law is

law. For wilful breakin' of church commands you will answer to church discipline. For despisin' an' scornin' your father, I disown you."

"You cannot" —

"Go, without one cent from me. Be a burden on your mother's relations — work, beg, what not; it is one to me till you repent."

"Mother!" was the heart-breaking cry.

"Let her alone, Marthy, she is cussed. Don't put a hand on her agin. She takes the consequences of her sin, and must leave the house, to starve for all I care, 'thout a sign from the dog."

"She won't dew no sech thing," dandelion greens strewed the floor as Lettice jumped to her feet, "tenerate as starve. If she goes, so do I."

"Go back to your work."

"No, sir; I've riz tew stay, an' my blood biles at the idee of flingin' that blessid gal at Phil. I've held my tongue 'cause it's the fashion, but I ain't blind, an' this pesterin' an' foolin' has been goin' on under my nose for mor'n a year; now, if you're goin' to wind up by sendin' her off, off I go tew."

"Don't let me speak agin. Fool! she's cussed."

"Cat's foot for cussin' done in sech a sperrit. Talk 'bout Africky, an' here you be tryin' tew sell a white soul if ever there was one, or give it away for nothin' in creation but tew lord it over your own gal. I never did see sech iniquity, so there!"

"Get into the kitchen with your greens."

"Thomas Wilson, you can't order me round now. I'm of age, an' I won't be sat down on, an' squoshed an' made mince-meat of. I feel as free an' equil as you dew, an' more tew, I guess, for you act like a man bound hand an' foot tew Satan, if ever a man was. You ain't in a pious temper, that's flat."

He pointed menacingly toward the kitchen.

"I'll inquire your 'pinions another time."

"You'll git 'em now. You're boun' for heaven, I s'pose. I will say an' stan' tew it that your present high cross tones would cut a figger up 'mong the harps, sackbuts, an' psalteries. You wouldn't chord, Thomas Wilson."

Suddenly 'Lisbeth broke Lettice's fierce harangue.

"Mother, if you were me would you marry Phil?"

"No, child; it would be sin."

"Marthy!" was all Mr. Wilson could utter.

"Thomas!" No challenge could have been more resolute.

The old lady had been rocking steadily, eying the group with set lips and spectacles pushed above the raving cap-border. At that point she spoke,—

"I tole ye so time an' agin; p'inted it out 'fore ye was merriid an' sence, Thomas; but you've gone on a-lettin' out here, an' givin' way there, till there's pesky little left of ye anywhere. Now I'd see. If a man can rule his house, I'd dew it."

"Thomas," said his wife, "come into the forerroom."

"Not a step. Beggin' a year won't alter the case."

"I am no beggar, Thomas," and truly she showed no suppliant mood; "but I should like to speak to you alone."

"The world may hear for all I care."

"Will you come?"

"No."

"Very well. Elizabeth is my child as well as yours."

"I have disowned her."

"My child alone, then; she will not leave me."

"This is my house. She starts" —

"One-third of this property is mine, paid for with my money, which you borrowed with my consent from my trustee."

"Marthy Baker!"

"My trustee, brother William, will see that she stays."

"She shall not speak to me, I tell you."

"That makes no difference."

"Stay an' not speak!"

"I shall remain, sir," quietly said 'Lisbeth.

Farmer Wilson drove his hands into his pockets and studied the floor. He was benumbed; for those three hitherto obedient women had worsted him. The property did lay as his wife had said; and no man had ever trifled with William Baker, or ever would, that he knew.

One way opened to a show of authority, and he took it.

"Until you repent, never speak to me; for I am not your father, or rather, you died this morning. If you wish to stay so, why stay."

Then he strode out of the house, stumbling over Dorothy curled up on a cricket, sobbing.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN OCCURRENCE AT PLYMOUTH

It was a good while before Dorothy took her wooden measure and went into the attic, and sat down on the log trough that held the sheep's grain. She mixed tears plentifully with corn and beans. A prolonged bleating greeted her as she went out; for it was much past grain-ing time, and a line of sheep strung from the east door-step down across the road into the field. Dorothy talked to them with tears still falling as she laid the grain handful by handful on raised stones or tufts of grass-roots.

"Oh, dear! how happy you all look. I s'pose it's because you ain't folks and can't think. No," she said decidedly, "only folks have souls, and you'd be glad if you knew enough. They're such a bother."

She made the last remark doubtfully to the upturned

faces all around her, as they raised their heads to break the rich kernels. It sounded rather wicked, but she was too sorry to stop.

“Some folks don’t have very big souls; for I heard Uncle William say he knows ’em that would rattle round in a chestnut-burr—all dried up, he said. I wonder if that is the matter with his; something ails it.”

She burst into tears afresh, ashamed of disloyalty to her father, and tormented by the grief of her wretched sister. ’Lisbeth was terribly distressed and beset somehow about souls and religion, mingled with Philip Harmon whom she did not like, and John Mayhew whom she did.

“There’s religion, too, seems to make more trouble than souls if anything. I don’t see how it can; but father says that’s what ails John, he hain’t got any good for anything. I don’t believe it if father did say so, ’cause ’tain’t likely he knows everything if he is my father. If John’s got any religion it’s good; I know ’tis, so there! What do they have more’n one kind for, anyway? and who knows which is which?”

She sat down on a small stone, and dropped her pained head into her hands. A persistent poking about her arm and hands at last called attention to a pet lamb peering beneath her hood. She threw both arms around its neck, and held her cheek against the soft wool, crying, —

"Oh, you don't have any soul, nor religion, nor anything! How I wish I was a sheep!"

Astonishment seized the flock; and it came up in a body, thrusting speculative noses against the red mittens and tear-stained face on 'Beth's neck, while Goliah, the solemn patriarch of the flock, whose empire neither boys nor restless house-dog dare invade, expressed sympathy by nibbling the curls that escaped from under Dorothy's hood.

"If you're through givin' out rations, come here an' take these eggs."

It was Mr. Wilson calling from the sheep barn with dreary sternness and hard pathos in his voice. He blamed everybody but himself. He did not know that merciless retribution already ploughed smarting furrows in his bosom. In the hour since coming out of his house, that question, "Who gave me to you and why?" had sighed over the bare, hot wastes of his soul like a ghostly wind, till he ached for the weariness of it; yet still it whisked at him from every corner, wailing down from scaffold and up from bay.

Dorothy gathered the eggs; but on one pretext or another Mr. Wilson kept her till Lettice tooted the dinner-horn quite cheerily, too much so it seemed to him; then himself and little daughter entered the house together, where most all seemed as aforetime at the dinner hour.

Lettice showed no ebbing faculty in cookery. The

dandelion greens were most appetizing and well-seasoned; in fact, the dinner showed unusual thought; and Mrs. Wilson, very pale, to be sure, minded the comfort of each after her own unruffled fashion.

One thing nearly upset him. 'Lisbeth's place had ever been at his right hand since she sat in a little wooden high chair; but she occupied Dorothy's seat by her mother,—they had exchanged places. A great sorrow smote him, as if the girl were dead; but he never flinched, and only hugged his thistley robe the closer, unaware that no heavenly hand laid it upon him, and in similar manner the weeks sped by.

She never spoke to him or when he was within hearing. His footfall on the doorstep brought silence, and stifled her melody at the wheel, for after a while she sang again. Once she failed to hear him, and while he waited shivering in the eastern lean-to, finished a song.

“ You tell me I'm old, and my hair is growing gray,
But I sit in the sunshine and watch you at play.
A livelier current doth run through my veins,
And I bless you, my children, again and again.

Ah! sport ye and wrestle, be glad as the sun,
And lie down to rest when your pastime is done.
Your dreams are of sunshine, of blossoms and dew,
And the God of the blessed doth watch over you.”

When May buds burst, trees and bushes bloomed,
bobolinks held picnic and wassail above emerald fields,

robins chirruped among thick orchard boughs, and swallows twittered under nesting barn-eaves, she went to Plymouth.

The church worshipping there was formed at Hollis before its earliest members left for Plymouth. The first log meeting-house was at the hill's foot, the last two-story structure crowned it. It looked far across Baker's River and intervale, and watched the tides of civilization as they rippled slowly up those valleys.

The last of June Mr. and Mrs. Wilson passed the tithing-man, who waited on the granite steps for unlucky boys, made apostate by a stray chipmunk, crossed the entry, by the foot of the gallery stairs, and wound along the narrow corridors between pen-shaped pews, till they entered the third one from the pulpit. Each pew had seats on both sides, narrow boards on hinges they were, so they might be raised at prayer-time, and give a family room to stand up.

The Wilsons were soon followed by the Lanes, Batchelders, and Harmons from their own neighborhood, though neither Phil nor Eunice appeared; and by families scattered over many miles of surrounding farm country, who filed in, subdued and sabbath-mannered, habited mostly in homespun. Many women carried daintily in tired fingers a sprig of mint or camomile, a bunch of ladies'-delight or sweetwilliam, and a little bead or satin bag holding a piece of sweet-flag root or stick of cinnamon. Later arrivals came from the long river

street and upland road, leading thence to that fair hill and hallowed house. They added a velvet coat or two, with ruffles, and several blue broadcloth ones, a few silken gowns and embroidered shawls. All possessed a governing air, like an ascendant chord of character, and some a stately courtesy, emphasized that day by Squire Livermore and other worshippers at the little Episcopalian church so green embowered and pastoral across the river.

The deacons took their seats below the pulpit; and Mr. Ward, pale from prayerful vigils, ascended the narrow stairs into a small pulpit level with the gallery.

After an invocation, a deacon lined a hymn, which was succeeded by a clang and clatter of pew seats as the congregation rose for prayer. Mr. Ward possessed a superior gift that way, both for length and excellence.

His head barely showed above the desk under the great sounding-board, while they hearkened to an hour and a half sermon very heedfully; more so, perhaps, when warmed by sunny airs than when in winter they relied on foot-stoves and tough constitutions. Noon hour was spent grouped upon grass-plats, stones, or in isolated pews, dispensing and receiving news dear to those hearts whose social life, even, depended so much on Sabbath noonings. Afternoon brought the same routine of service, varied at its close by the town clerk,

who, midst the quiet that uniformly marked his rising, published the intention of marriage between "Philip Harmon of Bridgewater and Eunice Bartlett of Plymouth. This is the first time of asking."

There was a flutter in the singers' seats, and sidelong glances at 'Lisbeth sitting among the trebles, but they beheld no sign. Farmer Wilson frowned viciously; his wife seemed rested. When they met in the entry' Lisbeth said, "I shall go home to-morrow, mother. I've had a lovely visit."

Never a syllable did Mr. Wilson utter on the road; but once in a while he struck the horse, and it reached home, wet and panting, nearly a half-hour before time. Lettice rushed out, anxiously inquiring, —

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing," replied Mrs. Wilson, pushing Lettice before her into the house.

"Nothin'! needn't tell me! Look at that hoss; he's a'most dead."

"Sh-sh-sh."

"Come in here." She pulled Mrs. Wilson into the pantry. "There, now, come; something 'bout 'Lisbeth, I know 'tis."

"Phil and Eunice are published."

"Cried in meetin'?"

"Yes."

"You heered it?"

"Yes."

Lettice's pale eyes grew handsome, swimming in their bath of grateful tears.

"I've been wicked, Mis' Wilson; the Lord does take care of his own, an' I've been feared he wouldn't. I guess I've kinder backslid, cordin' tew Meth'dists; but I won't agin."

So she pulled up the wooden latch, and the two thankful women went out into the kitchen together.

Monday 'Lisbeth returned, and Tuesday Eunice visited them all. While Lettice compounded luscious cake in honor of the promised bride, the young girls went up-stairs and planned a pretty wedding dress of "piney cloth," sheer and soft, which a few days later 'Lisbeth put upon the bride. In fact, Aunt Seth said, —

"I'm perpared for most things in this curus world; but this ere come so sudden, we never'd made a decent wedding, nohow, 'cept for 'Lisbeth. Phil's mother was completely wore out, an' they did need somebody tew hold by, that's a fact; an' so I told Phil."

Mr. Wilson never mentioned the subject nor any matter relating to either family; but when Phil and his bride made a short wedding tour of a mile or so from her house to his, they passed a pasture where he was driving oxen toward the bars.

One observant might have noticed honest old "Star" suddenly snort, and, with tail in air, jump over a tuft of sweet fern, as if he had been unexpectedly thumped by a stone. 'Lisbeth's song grew more tuneful every day,

as she spun wool or flax, or drove swift shuttles in clanging loom, or cared for dumb, helpless things in coop or barn, or helpful ones at home and abroad.

Toiling men, sweltering in her father's fields, whistled cheerily as they mowed their swaths, knowing her hands would prepare them cooling drinks; nor once doubting her remembrance till the last load should be stowed away among the brown rafters.

The reapers, bronzed and sinewy, blessed her where they cut the full-eared grain, and the binders, following after, as they clasped the stalks with golden fillets, and stooked the heavy sheaves.

In such manner did summer and harvest-time pass till Indian summer bathed the landscape in floods of misty, mellow sunlight. When the Academy opened, Mrs. Wilson sent her to her uncle's to stay until spring.

Mr. Wilson looked on preparations for her departure, on the vacant chair close to his wife at table. She proffered no explanation, he asked none. In round-about ways during the year, since the sugaring-off, 'Lisbeth heard of John; but no other gossip of a new love had reached her ear, and the incident had long since lost its point; but a supper, given by her uncle during the spring term of court, sharpened the memory of it.

CHAPTER XXVII

TEA AT MR. BAKER'S

TIME and again 'Lisbeth grew rosy the afternoon before the supper, while she and Lois searched along the eastern edge of the woods behind the Court House, peering among its beds of brown leaves for mayflowers and tender wood blooms, fragile and fragrant as those always are that feel the touch of springtime's primal dews. She schooled herself against any mention of John's name, while they hung partridge vines on sconces by mirrors, or pushed flower-stems or half-grown ferns into damp mosses that filled low vases on the dining-room table, or made rose-tinted bouquets of resolute little mayflowers for deep blue china vases. But try as she would her color flushed and paled and grew deep again; for Mr. Shaw, into whose office her lover went, and where he was then a partner, was bidden, and she should hear of him. Grafton County was famous for great cases conducted by great jurists. Stage-drivers brought over Thurlow Hill and down Haverhill pike and landed at the tavern men who made its rafters ring with repartee, and the old Court House tremble with their mighty for-ensic battles.

At early candlelight of the cool crisp evening they

came. The sheriff with sword and belted like a knight escorted the judge.

The squire and Mrs. Baker received them, he clad in velvet and fine ruffles, she in heavy brocade and filmy lace cap daintily bowed with the faintest rose-tinted ribbon. It was enough that the young girls lived and moved and had a being, nor could any surely conclude which was comelier, she with the steadfast face, or the other one so full of pulsing life.

The blessing craved at the table by Mr. Ward was quite like a prayer for the Court, and no one of those companionable men who composed the party needed Mistress Baker's drawing of green tea to develop their social gifts and graces.

Anecdote, argument, sharp sally, and witty rejoinder followed fast and long. When some paused they heard Sullivan's bell-cadenced tones explaining sylvan lore to 'Lisbeth, who sat beside him.

Peabody Rogers improved the opportunity to inquire, —

"Mr. Shaw, allow me to ask if you are related to the man into whose office John Mayhew went?"

"He is with me."

"Ah, with you?"

"Our partner at present, sir."

"Excellent! Mr. Baker, we all supposed he was to stay with you."

"I so intended," he replied, venturing no further explanation, hoping to end the talk.

"I heard," said Mr. Livermore, "that he was under some cloud on account of being a Methodist — people disapproved, or something of that kind."

"It would make no difference to me," answered the squire.

Mr. Sullivan intuitively felt the slow withdrawal of his listener from discussing fragile wood blossoms, and noted an anxious expression creep over the fair face beside him.

All the romance and chivalry of his quick Irish blood sprang to arms against Mayhew.

"He ought to come home for a wife," ventured Harry Hibbard, glancing across to sparkling Lois. Mr. Shaw observed no sign of love in that happy girl, so he answered carelessly, —

"He will not need to."

"Ah ! found one ?"

Judge Livermore, while trying a referee case at Bristol, heard somewhat of the gossip sown by Huldah and her friend, which so nearly soured Mrs. Lane's sugaring party ; so, quickened by the conversation, he inquired at that unlucky moment, —

"Did I not hear some prediction that he might become your son-in-law ?"

"Perhaps," replied Mr. Shaw, quite amused. "Certainly no man could have a better one, but he might choose from many."

"Gay, eh ?"

"No ; companionable and a gentleman born."

Conversation drifted away from Mayhew ; but after the guests returned to the forerom, Sullivan crossed over to Shaw, who was left alone, and demanded impatiently, but quietly, —

"Who is this Mayhew ?"

"The son of worthy parents, and for the rest such as you have heard."

"I'm afraid he is a puppy."

"What !"

"I don't believe a word of his worthiness."

"Do you doubt my word ? This temper is not like you, Sullivan, but I am slow to take offence if none is intended."

"I know you have no child, but how true is this infernal babble ? Tell me, and believe I do not ask out of mere curiosity."

"Not correct at all that I am aware of ; but I honestly hope he will marry soon, and I urge it. He needs a home."

"I hope he does not need a horsewhipping, and isn't a natural born idiot."

"Horsewhipping John Mayhew would be peculiar sport, I assure you, Mr. Sullivan ; but what is the matter, retained in a breach of promise suit ? Your testimony is wide of the mark, let it be what it will."

"I never heard of him in my life till to-night."

"Now I see. Whew ! Jupiter ! thinking of Squire

Baker's daughter. I looked her way before saying a word. She don't care a rap. You cannot suppose that other girl laughing with Mason is broken-hearted. Jove ! Mind that graceful and proud way of hers. I wonder if Mayhew ever saw her."

"He studied with Squire Baker. She is his niece."

"Why is she here, Mr. Sullivan ?"

"Her father lives some distance out of the village, so she stays here to attend the Academy. They say she reads Latin well, and keeps the young fellows on their taps in mathematics."

"Squire Baker's daughter in school also ?"

"I hear so."

Mr. Shaw eyed General Sullivan quizzically before remarking, —

"Well, I must say, Mr. Sullivan, you have picked up considerable information, and I should like to hear who were the witnesses."

"Oh, this afternoon I asked Mr. Bliss about Squire Baker's family."

"I should like to know one thing more if you thought to inquire. However do such women and girls grow way up among these hills ?"

"They are the blossoming of mighty roots, Mr. Shaw, and thrive as flowers do sheltered by cliffs. Lovely, yes ; but it is character which makes them so attractive. See Mistress Baker there, her manners are gentle as falling rose leaves ; but I warrant if one traversed her

conscience one would find granite solid under graciousness. So with those girls, beautiful and delicate, but reliant, able to stand by themselves."

"Well, I am going to sit on the fence to-morrow and see the Academy girls come out; meantime let us go and talk to this part of them, if they will condescend."

Mr. Rogers was just coming up to 'Lisbeth; so they stopped near-by where Lois stood, not unwilling either, for the dash and spirit of her character was very telling through the veil of severely courteous manners. She was pleased to see Mr. Shaw, having since supper determined to find out more as to John Mayhew and his suspected sweetheart.

"I was on my way to you, Mr. Shaw; for I wish to inquire after a student of father's who is now in your office.

"Indeed, Mayhew?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good fellow, first-rate, and good lawyer too; but he forgot something when he went from here."

"Did he? I'm so sorry. Do you know what it was? and did he send for it? for father will bring it from his aunt's if you wish."

"He did not ask me to bring it, but I will think it over. I presume he made love to some of these Academy girls."

"Why, Mr. Shaw, really, what if he did? didn't you say he is going to marry one from Boston?"

"Not quite so strong as that. I only declared my willingness to become his father-in-law if such a thing were possible."

Lois was daintily saucy as she perched her head on one side inquiringly, —

"Oh, yes; well, Mr. Shaw, what are the chances?"

"Poor, very; in fact, there are none."

"Oh!"

"Yes; while I may be willing to suit my friends who mention it, Judge Livermore and the rest, the idea has never occurred to Mayhew, I'll be bound."

Mr. Sullivan was delighted as a lover when the shadow he alone had noted fled from 'Lisbeth, and Lois, her true-love quest completed, recalled the forgotten belongings.

"Now, Mr. Shaw, as to that bundle John left, cannot we plan it some way? Let's see; we will make it small as possible, and give it to one of our stage-drivers; he will see to it, I know, so it won't trouble you a mite."

"You cannot crush it, and I wouldn't trust it on the driver's seat, anyway."

"No, of course not; under the seat it would be entirely safe."

"It won't go under the seat; and, besides, I should be sure to steal it."

"I'm sure, Mr. Shaw" —

"It is no use," and a deprecating smile passed over his fine face as he shook his head.

"But" —

"My dear young lady, do not insist. I cannot be trusted, and he must come. He should have been here long before now."

"That is too bad, for he must need it."

"He does terribly; I told you so, but I cannot carry it. My dear Miss Baker, the parcel is a wife, and — I am a bachelor."

"Oh! oh, dear me!"

A hearty laugh all around covered Lois's confusion; and Mr. Shaw remarked, —

"Here is a viol, who plays?"

"My father does," answered Lois.

"And who sings?"

"Both of these young ladies certainly," replied Mr. Rogers. The request for music became general; and Mr. Baker ran over the strings a moment, then played while the young girls sang the song of "Ruth:" —

"She stood breast high 'mid the corn,
Clasped by golden lights of morn,
Like the sweetheart of the sun,
Who a glowing kiss hath won.

On her cheek an autumn flush
Deeply ripened — such a blush
In the midst of brown was born,
Like red poppies grown with corn.

And her hat with shady brim
Made her tressy forehead dim;

Thus she stood amid the stooks,
Praising God with all her looks.

‘Sure,’ he said, ‘Heaven did not mean
Where I reap thou shouldst but glean ;
Lay thy sheaves adown, and come,
Share my harvest and my home.’”

“I declare,” said Shaw to Sullivan, for they still were side by side, “I do declare, I can’t imagine why Mayhew does not propose to one of those girls, or did not when he was here. Jove! I guess he can’t decide which to ask, but he might shut his eyes and take the chances.”

“Perhaps neither would listen.”

“I don’t believe it, and I’ll ask him.”

“Do; if his memory needs a jog it might be effectual.”

“Sullivan, you make me laugh. As if” —

The music struck up again and continued till ten o’clock, a belated hour for taking leave, excusable only because of distinguished visitors and the infrequency of such social opportunities. After all sang “Auld Lang Syne,” the good-nights were reluctantly spoken.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MR. HOLMES BUYS LUMBER

'LISBETH went to her room happy, for Mr. Shaw had no daughter, she heard him say so; and the stars shining through the muslin curtains twinkled gayly down, as if they understood, while she toned a low song as she brushed her soft hair.

In a few weeks she returned home, and all summer long followed the same helpful, patient way as aforetime. Blessings from toilers in field and house fell upon her, even as during the first season.

But there was a change, indefinable at first, that shaped itself gradually into radical unhappiness. Huldah's sugaring-off tattle seemed to die for a year, and then was planted anew as it were, just about the time of her home coming.

Huldah sighed more than ever; she wore the willow constantly, and mourned Mayhew's short-comings at self-invited visits to each house round about. Her harrowing sighs and rueful chatter plainly disturbed her listeners, though she stoutly affirmed disbelief of the traducements that she scattered. Work was varied by long speculations and debate concerning John and 'Lisbeth. Women visiting hardly put on their caps and

fastened their knitting sheaths before commencing the argument.

The question whether herbs dried best spread on shelves or hanging head downward from nails, the comparative merits of spruce and root beer, old Hannah Bisbee's rheumatism and young Hannah's flirtations, the compounding of all household luxuries and medications, were, each and several, mingled with chit-chat as to them.

Also a new factor was added to the general sum in the person of Mr. Isaiah Holmes, who lived over toward Cockermouth River; a man of easy, confidential ways, a widower about forty years old, of medium height, rather stout, and quite bald. He had a fresh complexion, smooth round face, and light blue eyes, large and pleasant, but scarcely steady. He was a born supplanter.

The year before he wished to go to General Court, and began the canvass by assuring the only candidate who had been mentioned that he was for him. He so assured everybody else, and extolled the other man, slyly adding, "Some threaten not to vote for him; but I'm a Democrat dyed in the wool, and always vote my ticket." Again, as caucus drew near, he told what he would do and would not do if he were a candidate, till finally, much to his surprise he averred, he was put up at the last moment, and carried the caucus ten to one.

No sooner had John gone than he mentally appropri-

ated 'Lisbeth, the choicest girl of all adjacent tribes, to himself. He felt conscious of honoring her exceedingly in so doing, and immediately planned to bring the distinction into favorable light with her.

His business was buying flaxseed, peltry, and lumber; so he ran in one day, cool, suave, to see if Mr. Wilson had any timber for sale, and found he owned a good many oaks beyond the pinnacle in the sheep-pasture woods, that were judged very good for staves. It was exactly what he wanted, so he said,—excellent market for cooper's materials; so his horse was put up, and he partook of dinner before the long tramp to the woods.

Of course he bought all the oak timber, for it excused frequent visits to see it.

He often spoke in praise of John to Mrs. Wilson and Lettice. The wily maid observed that he soon began to tip his phrases with hard points, like the snapper on a whip.

One day she questioned him a little:—

“You've been tew Boston lately?”

“Oh, yes; I go reg'lar twice a year or so.”

“Do you know anything ag'in John Mayhew?”

“Why, bless me, no, I don't! It isn't against a handsome man that he's having a good time, is it? You can't expect anything else.”

“'Pends on what you call a good time. Is he runnin' round with good-for-nothin' fellers, an' takin' tew their ways?”

"Oh, I guess not," said he carelessly; "but he's in with some pretty high bucks, or that's what I hear. John is bright and snappy, and a fav'rite natchully."

Lettice gave a curious look after him as he went out, and commenced humming.

Some time after he met Huldah on his way to the oaks, and they stopped to chat by the wayside. She questioned him about John, and he told her some things worried him. It was rumored that John was going on pretty fast, and he guessed he was flirting, if nothing more. Mr. Holmes claimed to believe little of the reports himself; but then, "Where there was so much smoke there must be some fire."

Huldah sniffed and sighed before asserting that some of the neighbors were concluding Holmes's oak timber bargain precluded another.

He made no direct reply, but fingered his watch-chain like a young boy caught naming apples all by himself. Then he oh'd a little, and bade the spinster good-day, putting no negation to rising gossip.

Huldah folded her thin shawl closely about her thin arms, crumpled her forehead into sanctimonious furrows, and went her way, to repeat what she chose.

She declared she knew some things if she could only speak of them; but she never had related confidences imparted to her, and never should.

Thus noxious weeds were fostered, which throve along with Canada thistles and burdocks, till, by the time one

ripened, the other opened its tiny seed-pods, and black-tipped, feathery falsehoods flew all about.

'Lisbeth became oppressed by such environments. She knew gossip of all sorts kept more or less company with bundles of warp and filling carried to Mrs. Willard's loom; so she went over one late afternoon and found Ruth under the maples netting a fine towel, who started up at sight of such a troubled face.

"Why, 'Lisbeth, what is the matter?"

"I've come to talk, if I can; but don't say a word. Let me think a moment."

She pushed Ruth back into a low chair, and sat on the grass leaning against her. On one side the brook gurgled over stones and shallow reaches, on the other floated a subdued cadence of treadle and loom.

"I am waiting," Ruth said, after a long while. 'Lisbeth answered, —

"Tell me all about it, Ruth."

"You don't mean" —

"Yes, I do; all, every bit."

"O 'Lisbeth, it is not true! Richard says so."

"Whispers come to me, and people drop what they are saying as I go near. Why do they? Tell me, Ruth, for I can ask no one else."

So she heard the plain truth, and sat clasping her head in the hollow of her hands till the shadows grew long on her father's meadow, then gravely said, —

"I am satisfied marrying a Boston girl would be best for him."

"I know it wouldn't. Nobody can tell where these rumors start; it seems as though Huldah carries them round in her reticule. You must not say that again. It is not best."

"Saying so does not prove it."

"He loves you, Elizabeth Wilson; that is why, and reason a-plenty too."

"There are two of us now to go on in this wretched way; half the misery would be saved if this were true."

"Would it? The last time I saw John Mayhew he had a conscience; and he loves you, I say, Elizabeth Wilson. I declare for it, I don't know what ails you. Seems as if you were turning into stone."

"I feel like a rock sometimes. Ruth, you don't know all. Father has never spoken to me since Phil rode by with Eunice more than a year ago. If this should happen," she was white as ashes, and the words fell hard as hail on the listener, "maybe in time, not now, ever so long after to-day, I might marry to please father; and the other, hearing, would feel shriven of his broken oath."

'Lisbeth stared desolately into the road, as if she had flung the fragments of her life there to be bruised by every passing wheel.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Ruth. "Marry Holmes, I s'pose. Mother thinks he is full half to blame for all this tattle. You have thought and thought till you can-

not think at all. Father Benson preached last Sabbath about tempting ourselves, — just exactly what you are doing.”

“Duty would be something if he fails.”

“Duty! don’t crawl behind that.”

Ruth leaned forward, and took 'Lisbeth, on whom she had always leaned, by the shoulders, giving her an energetic shake, saying, —

“It is a blind struggle picking out things in the dark; but you’ve got it to do, and that is all there is to it. Find out where duty is. Promise me. I’m frightened when you look so. Promise.”

'Lisbeth nodded; and Ruth rose, took a towel, soft and old, she had been using for a pattern to net by, led 'Lisbeth to the brook, and bathed her swollen eyes.

“There! go in and see mother. I’ll pick up these towels, but don’t wait.”

She had thrown them over her arm when a scratching of claws over rotten logs, and crunching of dry twigs under foot, directed her attention to the King and his hounds.

“Hi! pups, don’t run over the gal,” cried he, loping across the brook on large stones. “Hello, Ruth, how be ye? I see 'Lisbeth scootin’ through the door. Whew! Peppery weather, ain’t it?”

“Very warm, Mr. King. How did you coax the trout to bite?”

“Went up tew them deep trout holes in the woods:

they bit like Samhide, an' so did the skeeters, darn 'em; I've had plaguey good luck. Give these tew your mother; I strung 'em purpose for her; guess they'll taste kinder good."

Ruth carried the trout, strung on a crotched stick, to her mother, while the angler sauntered below the bridge, remarking to his dogs, —

"Ruth's been cryin'. She didn't want me tew go in, for all she asked me so nice. Why? 'Cause t'other one cried too. Now, what for?

"I'll bet a fish-hook it's this ere tattlin', an' I've s'pected it; allus a winkin' an' pullin' gowns, a yankin' apuns, an' passin' snuff when she runs in, jest as though she didn't sense when she sees half a dozen heads together, an' Huldry talkin' low an' confidin', that them wimen wa'nt goin' on bout the catechism. I tole John I'd ketch onto things as ort tew be seen tew, an' I will.

"There ain't a decent fish hole within forty rods, but I guess I can yank this ere hook round mongst stones an' gravel if I want tew."

He sat on a rock dangling his line till 'Lisbeth started homeward, then wound it round the birch rod and hurried after. As he loped down the little barn hill after giving half his fish to Mrs. Wilson, he gave an opinion to his companions, —

"Yes, I was right. Thunderation, how queer folks are!"

To 'Lisbeth it did seem as if new complications trapped her day by day. After the house was still, save for the chirping of crickets, she knelt before her window in the moonbeams. She had weighed duty towards her father and lover, and was further bound to stern searching of obligation selfward.

She was an entity, an atom tethered to life by spiritual essence, alone in responsibility, alone in accountability, sole respondent at the last assize for deeds done in the body.

She peered far out into the night, questioning. After a grievous time she caught an answer, wafted in on mellow moonbeams from the steadfast darkness of sleeping woods and the upholding strength of holy hills, and at last she slept, conqueror, under a Great Captain whose legions still parted the conscious air.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE KING TAKES A SAMPLE TO MARKET

THE first week in October the King dug a few potatoes, then leaned on his hoe, hitched up his "galluses," squinted at the hazy sky, and remarked to his son, —

"Dave, it 'pears like a spell of good weather; an' you must dig these taters, for I've got other fish tew fry. I've been waitin' for this Injin summer."

"Plaguey lot of taters for all alone."

"The gals'll help pick 'em up."

He wasted no breath, but loped into the kitchen, took a big yellow pitcher with crinkled gray stripes around it into the cellar and brought it back full.

"Good time tew pull beets, an' sich," said dame Nabby, tilting to and fro on the hind legs of a kitchen chair and doubling yarn, one thread white, one blue, for winter feeling. No answer; and she wound more slowly, turning questioning eyes to the chimney-corner where her husband was busy with pitcher and pipe, winking slowly and thoughtfully at intervals.

Her chair came forward with a bang, but he gave no sign of hearing.

"Say, be you goin' tew git them beets an' garden sass in outen the frost, David? They'll spile, ev'ry one of 'em."

The Egyptian Sphinx is not more dumb and unheeding. She knew his moods, and made no further effort to break the silence. After a while he rose, took a favorite gun down from the hooks, examined, and carefully wiped it with a piece of buckskin, oiled, and set it up against the doorpost, with butt upon the doorstep. The hounds sniffed, trotted smartly out and squatted down alongside, while their master gazed out of the south window at nothing for a short time, went across the room, drank a gourdful of water, and faced about, saying, —

"Lay my best clo'es on the bed, Nabby."

"What!" The streaked ball fell into her lap.

"Don't holler so; the folks 'll think we're a-fire."

"What'n creation be you goin' tew dew, David?"

"Take a jaunt."

"Jaunt! A tew-year-old boy ain't friskier'n you 'pear tew be. Where is it you be goin'?"

"Can't tell for sartin; must see 'bout tradin' pelts. Beechnuts and ilenuts air thick as spatters, an' breast bones of chickens don't have skurcely a dark spot in 'em; wile geese and swallers went south airly; beavers air diggin' down intew the groun'; coons air fatter'n ever I see 'em; an' squirrels have double coats of fur, same with foxes. It's goin' tew be a rippin' winter for huntin' an' trappin'."

"Good land! you dew have spells of bein' crazier'n a loon."

"I'm clear as a bell, an' springy as a new trap, mother," he remarked cheerily:

"Who's tew fetch in the corn fodder, an' pull beets an' turnups, an' the rest of the garden truck?"

"Dave an' the gals. It's healthy work for 'em."

"Dave an' all of us can't lift that great green cart-tongue to the staple."

"Pull the seat ouden the waggon, an' hitch the ole hoss in."

"Spile the waggon — make it pison dirty."

"Cracky, Nabby, you ain't so dretful helpless."

Spread the ole blue coverlits intew it jist as you've done hundreds of times. Now stop fussin' an' git my things."

She hurried into the small bedroom, and he heard a click of the cedar chest and clatter of brass-handled drawers before she came out.

"There they be on the bed. Git intew them quick if you're goin', an' not wait till sundown."

Very soon the teapot was spluttering on live embers, and a wholesome morning luncheon was ready by the time Mr. King emerged, cleanly shaven, clad in blue full cloth suit with brass buttons. He always wore pants a trifle short, but the cowhide boots were soft and new.

"Better put my razor intew the game bag, an' my best black stock."

"Why don't you wear the stock?"

"Chokes when you're trampin'. I'm goin' tew wear a frock over this coat, 'cause I'm likely tew sheer off intew the woods any minnit. I can stuff it intew the pouch when I don't want it."

"How'll one of them blue mixed ones do? They're thin and light."

"Jest the checker."

He ate heartily, pulled his frock on, set a rather seedy high hat on his head, threw the gun to his shoulder, and, followed by the hounds, started through air heavy with odors of forest, and hum of droning bees.

"See that big feller on the chiny-oyster, Nabby. How I'd like tew line the yellow imp home!"

"Better, father," hurriedly she suggested.

"Can't. Ready tew go, an' I'm goin'. Guess I'll stay at your sister Mary's down tew Bristol to-night."

"S'pose you'll go fur as Concord?"

"Yes, I'm goin' tew scurry roun' in the woods an' take a sample to show what coats the critters air wearin'. I sha'n't stop short of there, 'tain't likely."

"When'll you be home, David?"

A peculiar solicitous gaze after the question pained him; but he replied bravely,—

"I dunno. Mebbe bein' so near, I shall run down tew Derryfield an' catch a salmon, for ole times."

"Why, David! you won't be back for a month."

"P'r'aps not. I'm goin' tew sorter hold a pertracted meetin' 'long of ole friends in the woods an' out. All on ye keep chipper."

He pushed along at a dog-trot, leaving them at the potato field; but just before entering the thick woods he turned and beheld his wife shading her eyes with one arm, and the children around her. The old man choked; for he loved that tranquil spot and plain family, even to the every-day good-natured naggings between himself and his true-hearted wife. In the distance they seemed beautiful to his constant heart. He swung his hat, and receiving an answering salute, drew a rough sleeve across his eyes, saying to the dogs, "Darn it all, we've

got tew go," and disappeared behind the hemlocks, darker than was their wont, because sumachs waved crimson plumes here and there among their green ranks. He brought down a squirrel with his old Queen's-arm, and went directly to "Aunt Mary's," leaving there the following Monday when the gray skin was quite dry.

A stage rolled and bumped up just after he started; and the driver called, "Hello, where you goin'?"

"Down the road a piece."

"Fur as Concord?"

"Yes."

"Git up here; stick them dogs 'long of the band-boxes."

"What's that?" inquired Mr. Marden, pointing at the gray tail.

"End of a sample."

"Where you goin' with it?"

"Tew Boston."

"Whew! git out; you ain't travellin' there with one squirrel skin?"

"Pooh! you kin rein six horses on a dead run down hill, keepin' this ole ark swingin' an' pitchin' 'tween the gutters, an' pull up at the foot 'thout a dead critter, nur a strap broke; but you don't understan' *fur*, les you'd know this stingy bit is jest as good as a sled load."

"Well, I vum if I b'leve you're goin' to Boston for nothin' but that; no, I don't."

"I'm goin' there, an' I'm goin' tew kerry this pelt, 'thout one of us gits lost."

"Carry it and be blessed; but tell us a story."

From then till after sunset, when the stage drew up at Gasses, he beguiled the road with stories of hunting and fishing as they passed hills and mountain, merry running brook, and beautiful intervalles, warm and wondrous with autumn dyes. He hung around Marden while the horses were being unhitched till he found a chance to ask him, —

"You won't let on 'bout my goin' tew Boston, will you? Our folks might be oneasy, an' I'm 'bliged tew go."

"See here, Jim Langdon an' I take some stages down next week. Can't you wait?"

"Fits like a wedge. I want tew hook one or tew fish down by Aumskeag Falls, an' brile 'em on a board. If you'll haul up at Webster's, I'll be ready."

"All right; we allus change hosses there."

So it happened the next week that the door of a Boston law-office seemed to burst open, admitting two dogs and a man. The stranger bore an eager, kindly, resolute face, full of light that quickly died out on observing two youngerly men start up from beside a long, green baize-covered table, strewn with books and writing material, and fairly stare at him in quizzical wonder. He stooped and pulled a hound's long ear, explaining, —

"I thought he was here."

The men exchanged a wink which touched the King. He drew up by his gun and demanded peremptorily, —
"Ain't this Shaw and Crowninshield's?"

"It is; can we help you?"

"No; I'm lookin' for a man."

"Here are two."

He gave them an unflinching look that struck squarely at them, and a curious inflection pointed the quiet remark, —

"Nothin' like I'm sarchin' for. Him as I knowed up norrard," jerking his thumb in that direction.

"He had a name?"

"Yes; an' a good one tew, John Mayhew."

"Oh, certainly; he will be in soon. You are a friend?" Mr. King proudly replied.

"Sence John was a baby I've been jest that tew him an' he tew me."

The indescribable grace and pathos touched their manhood and made them cordial.

"Sit right down and wait. What beautiful hounds! I never saw such muzzles and marking."

"Prob'ly not; no, thankee," said he, slowly regarding the room, with crowded bookshelves up to the ceiling, and loose cobwebs flying here and there. "No; the dogs would ruther be in the sun. Tell" —

The door opened and John confronted him, but the King found his tongue first.

"John, John, it's me! me an the dogs, see 'em!"

"Mr. King! Uncle David! How in creation did you come here? And the dogs too."

Mr. King regarded the young man, brimful of boyish glee, who shook him by his great shoulders, and fondled the dogs as they barked and frisked and kissed his hands. Surely he was the self-same boy, showing graver lines; yet it was he as of old. No hidden faithlessness skulked in his true glance, nor deceit in his ringing welcome.

Some hint of Mr. King's anxiety John perceived, and straightway was troubled. He laid both hands gently on his visitor's shoulders and inquired, —

"Why did you come, Uncle David?"

"Come down with Mard, an' brought samples of fur; big season comin'."

"Is that all, or were you sent? Has some terrible thing happened?"

"I ain't sent, an' I hain't heerd of no sick folks. I run up tew Mis' Lane's day 'fore I come off, an' they was chipper, though I seed Bill Symons as I tramped 'long, he is pooty much moon-colored — yaller janders."

John still felt a mental certainty that Mr. King's journey concerned himself primarily, and soberly invited him into his private room. As his guest came to a seat he smoothed John's sleeve, saying, —

"I'll be doggoned if I don't b'leve you're John, jest John."

There rose one peal of oldtime laughter, succeeded by the question, —

“Who says not? What infernal prattle is being made about me?”

“Don’t git riled; le’s begin at firstly. I clipped up the paster tew Mis’ Lane’s ’bout daylitdown t’other night, an’ tole her where I was boun’, an’ so on. She was pesky glad, an’ sent her best love an’ these traps. There, ain’t them bustin’ gloves, gray fox skin, an’ here’s three linen handkercher’s, Loizy made them. I’ve got sunthin’ else. Jerusalem! if I’ve lost that. Thunderation! what an ole blunderbuss, huntin’ in the wrong pocket. Here ’tis — bosom that ’Lisbeth worked for Francis — ain’t that han’some. Your aunt sent it.”

When John opened his desk, and laid gloves and kerchiefs down, but carefully locked the embroidered linen in a drawer, the King winked his eyes. The voice that questioned him was husky.

“What have you come to say?”

“Le’s go intew the sun,” tugging at his stiff stock. “Ain’t there a rod of lan’ a body might stan’ on?”

“We’ll go to the Common.”

There the king said, —

“Now I can breathe. S’posen you an’ I change work. I’ll be lawyer, you witness, and the dogs jury.”

“Go ahead.”

“Are you thinkin’ — Huh! I’d rather be horse-whipped, plague take it.”

John suggested composedly, —

“The jury is uneasy.”

“I feel meaner’n a skunk; but what Father Benson calls a powerful sense of duty driv me here, and — well” —

“See here, Uncle David, out with it. It won’t kill me.”

“Not less I shoot ye. Don’t upset the lawyer ag’in. Are you goin’ tew be merried tew a Boston gal?”

“Me?”

“That’s what I said — yes or no.”

“No,” thundered John.

“Don’t yell so. ’Tain’t likely these folks care much about it. Are you spoonin’ or settin’ up with one?”

“No.”

“Are you goin’ tew or wantin’ tew?”

“No, and I never shall.”

“Whew! I knowed the minit I set eyes on ye, but I couldn’t help mistrustin’ about it ’fore you come in, a breathin’ that air, ’thout no sun ’cept what squirrels in through cobwebs. I was feared your soul was dried up, but ’tain’t; you’re John, jest John. I’m ’shamed” —

“Don’t say that, Uncle David. I am so thankful. There is mischief and falsehood up home, and the best man I ever knew asks what he has a right to ask.”

The old man jumped to his feet and caught John’s arm.

“I’m glad you spoke them words, ’cause I felt kinder

hampered like, feelin' you might think I was meddlin' or sumthin'. You know 'bout Phil and Eunice, — merried."

"Yes."

"Well, it did seem after they was spliced, as though we might have some peace, but no; Huldly begun a-buz-zin' 'bout this gal down here, then Holmes come — he'd palaver an Injun outen his moccasins — an' sech sithes as we've had from her, an' butter-mouth speeches from him would sicken a dog."

"Who is Holmes?"

"He's a timber man; bought Wilson's oaks. Comes tew Boston, he says."

"Oh, yes, he runs into our office once in a while."

"Same critter."

"How did those falsehoods originate?"

"Didn't 'riginate. Blowed up on an east wind, or popped outen mud like musketeers."

"I suppose Mr. Wilson is severe as ever."

"Severe! well, I guess. He hain't spoke one word tew that gal sence one day spring after you come away, when she tole him that she couldn't an' wouldn't merry Phil. Lettice says 'twas awful when she faced him, white as snow an' her eyes like flints strikin' fire. He meant tew put her outen the house, but Mis' Wilson hindered."

The young man covered his face and turned away, whispering hoarsely, "'Lisbeth, my poor 'Lisbeth."

"That gal is true as a die, John; and 'tween the ole man's pride an' the wimmin's knack of hidin' things, nobody, not even Nabby, 'spects how 'tis. Lettice an' me, we talk over the garden-fence, or when I'm gunnin' an' she pickin' arbs an' so on."

A soft color, like a girl's, suffused Mayhew's cheek as he touched the King's sleeve and asked, —

"Uncle David, will you tell me about 'Lisbeth?"

"Her? She's jest the same, John; nothin' like her 'mong them hills, never, nor any place else; a bit quieter lately. I can't make you understan' how 'tis, sunthin' onpossible tew trap intew words. It's her as brought me."

"Did she ask you to come?" he inquired eagerly.

"No; but I've seen shadders chasin' sun over her same as they foller over our white clovers, till I'm tuckered out. Her load is hefty, John; an' I've come tew see if you can't lift a little."

"I wish I could carry it all, Uncle David."

"Sartin; but you can't, an' scowlin' fiercer 'n a wile cat don't help none; sunthin's got tew be *done*. You're goin' tew write a few words tew her for me tew carry back."

"I promised Mr. Wilson" —

"Not tew court his gal, — darned simple performance as ever I see, but that ain't the pint. Can't you tell her you ain't the meanest cuss on the footstool?"

"Yes, I can and I will."

"John, my boy, I'm glad I come. It's all right. Let's walk round to a furrier's, an' give him a squint of this gray pelt."

CHAPTER XXX

A LATE OCTOBER DAY

INDIAN summer, keeping company with hazy horizons and heavenly illuminations on forest, field, and hill, still lingered, though the King had been gone three weeks. A couple of rainy days they had, but it cleared off warm as before. Season-wise neighbors pointed out the thickness of leaves, their reluctant fall and their gorgeous blazonry, as sure omens of a hard, sharp winter. "One extreme follows another," they said on mild afternoons, when the sun melted those landscape dyes into liquid softness.

About eleven o'clock on such a day Jack went in from the field and said to his mother, —

"Father says I may run awhile."

He had spent many days of the gone summer with 'Lisbeth among all kinds of growing things, tracking through meadow or up the heights. In their rambles they had answered the King's hello in forest nooks or beside fern-banked streams, till Mr. Wilson boasted that Jack had learned trees, root and branch, and could talk of stones, flowers, or birds "good as the minister any

day," though never hinting the name of his instructor. He wanted another day out on the hills; but his mother, being busy, answered carelessly, —

"Well, Watch can go, and you may take Tom and Dorothy."

"Watch may go if he wants to; Dorothy's no good, Tom neither, — scared to death at a woodpecker."

"Go alone, then," remarked Mistress Dorothy, not realizing how she sent cold shivers down her brother's back, as she swung her sunbonnet and ran out in pursuit of a swallow-tailed butterfly, bright yellow barred with black.

"Why can't 'Lisbeth come along," asked he.

"Certainly she can. 'Lisbeth," called her mother, "put the spinning-wheel by and take your bonnet. Jack wants you, and don't hurry home; take a good long walk."

"My stent is only half done, mother."

"It makes no difference; improve this weather."

Lettice handed each boy a small wicker basket as he went out, saying, "Here's sunthin'll taste good when you're tired of trampin'."

Dame Wilson was raging; but she had nothing to say, for she and son Thomas had given the girl up to her mother. A pretty mess they were making of it to be sure, but then, — she rocked wrathfully back and forth, furious that she must be silent, unsettled more and more by Lettice's humming, which she despised.

Lettice kept at it till the old lady snatched her snuff box out.

"Here, Lettice, dew try my new snuff."

"Can't stop, m — m — m." Again after a moment.

"Marthy, Lettice better start the fire; I s'pose she'll make Johnnycake for dinner."

"Riz bread, m — m — m — m."

The dame hitched and squirmed, and finally arose.

"I'm good mind to go somewheres."

"I would, mother," said Mrs. Wilson; "better run down and see if Mr. King is back."

"Didn't Lettice go down? P'raps she knows all 'bout it. I'd ruther go tew Mis' Lane's."

"No, I don't. I ain't his gardeen, m — m — m."

"It's warm an' sunshin'y; I guess I'll go."

She was arrayed in Sunday garb very quickly, and took a stout stick Thomas gave her, and went out hoping if she found a woman who could sing, she would sing and be done with it. Lettice was confused by her sudden departure.

"For the land's sake! what made her dew that? she bounded off like a parched pea."

"Your humming, Lettice; she detests it."

"Hummin'! was I hummin'? Funny I didn't know it, but I've been pritty much taken up with my own idees for quite a spell." She looked intently up the road at the compact, erect figure as if expecting it to turn back, but smiled serenely at last.

"I guess she'll go, Mis' Wilson; she's beyend the orchard bars, most tew the big maple. You don't feel very well this mornin'."

"No, one of my old headaches."

"What brought it on? There, don't cry; it is some trouble hitched on to them staves, I know, and I've expected it from the fust. I know'd when I see that glib-tongued critter hitchin' his hoss that I oughter stan' at the outer door with a mortar pestle. Staves, fiddlesticks! Cooper's timber! 'twan't no sech a thing; good land! he didn't care if nobody ever see a berril."

"Mr. Wilson says John is going to be married before spring, Lettice."

"Well, he ain't, I'll be bound. I've tried tew keep this tattle from your ears; for it all comes from Isaiah Holmes and Huldy Moses, every word on't. Last week, as I was comin' home from visitin' Mis' Batchelder, there they stood by the sheep-paster bars, a-talkin' in the hiddenest way. They looked awful meachin' when they see me; but I never said one word, an' kep' along tew this side of the schoolhouse; an' there I turned intew the chip-yard, an' set down on a log till Huldy ketched up — she wa'n't much behind, I can tell you — then I give her a piece of my mind."

"Lettice!"

"Yes, ma'am, I did; but don't you worry one mite. My grief an' patience! we can't travel them tew yere old roads ag'in; an' we ain't goin' tew, nuther. Let

things have their run ; it's the season for fall fevers, an' Mr. Wilson's been chasin' round a pretty muddy swamp lately ; but we live in a healthy destrick, so most folks gits over what ails 'em, an' I mistrust he will, though it may take somethin' bitter as gall an pisen as poke tew cure him."

Mrs. Wilson made no reply, and her silence alarmed Lettice.

"You ain't plannin' tew sacrifice that gal tew his say-so at last, be ye ? Jest try it, an' you're off'rin' will be took away."

"You are irreverent, Lettice."

"No, ma'am ; my mind was on gifts to selfishness. I ain't speakin' of off'rin's as God calls for ; them are tew be give up 'thout questions, an' singin' if we can, though the key may be a very low minor. All I'm afeared on is Mr. Wilson 'll work on your mind like snows that melt an' run down into our medder brook, fillin' it fuller an' fuller, rushin' over the dam, a-makin' it shiver an' scream till bimeby out it goes from flash-board tew foundation. I've been wantin' tew talk this over quite a spell, an' now won't you promise me that 'Lisbeth may go back tew the 'Cademy ?"

"I feel, Lettice, that you are almost an equal guardian of my child since our trouble came, and I shall arrange it as you propose."

"That makes me happy, Mis' Wilson. My stars ! here 'tis half after eleven, an' not a step took towards

dinner. Le's see ; if you've a mind tew pare a few tart apples, I'll make a short-cake stid of pie. Mr. Wilson 'll kinder like it. This afternoon we shall be all alone, an' we'll plan for our woollen web a-settin' by the winder, where we can see the neighbors harvestin', an' watch the trees an' hills between stitches ; for I declare I never see sech a sight as they be, a'most like Moses' bush that burned with fire."

Meanwhile the children started up the ridge to the Pinnacle. 'Lisbeth helped the boys fly their kites, chase squirrels, and battle beechnuts on the way ; so they reached the summit just in season to hear the call of dinner horns and replying halloos of hungry men. They sat down under some trees edging the forest, to watch farmers going to dinner, and open their own baskets. The sun billowed in floods over mossy rock and through forests of red and gold, burned on weeds in gray stubble fields, glowed in clumps of bushes on bare pasture sides, and brightened mowing lands sparsely studded with late clovers.

Purple frost flowers and goldenrod nodded near them ; and white oaks were magnificent along the pond's far shore, where the hills bathed their crimson foot-fringe in pellucid waters.

They leaned against gray tree-boles, and strained their eyes to take in the glory of those wondrous hills as they dimmed and flamed under the cloud shadows and sunlight that chased one another over them.

Suddenly Jack held his hand up. "See here, 'Lisbeth, what I have found; this shell is cracking apart."

He held up a half-split shell in an open burr, which he found bedded in the underlying black mould. From the kernel pushed creamy white sprouts.

"Why, it's sprouted like a potato."

"Look here," said she, touching a tender shoot crowned by two new ruddy leaves. "Find where this leads."

Jack was indolent only toward corn, potatoes, and the like. He dug earnestly and carefully with a fork whittled out of a broken branch.

"Oh, oh my, 'Lisbeth!"

"Well."

"This stalk reaches to some small roots, and out of them run—dear, I can't tell how many little bits of ones; but," he said disappointedly, "there isn't a sign of a beechnut."

"Look sharp; brush the dirt from the roots."

"There 'tis, 'Lisbeth, true as you live; a very, very beechnut, and seems as if this little stem grows right out of it."

"That is so. The nut pushed one sprout upward for the tree, the rest downward for roots."

"Say, 'Lisbeth, how did it plant itself?" asked he, gazing intently upon his scientific discovery.

"Sharp frost broke the spiny burr from the tree and split it. It fell on leaves that winds whirled about,

burying it deeper and deeper, covering it warmly. Storms watered it, and the sun nursed it into life."

"Then," said he, telling off his fingers, "it takes frost, wind, storm, and sun to start a beech. Seems as if one of them would kill it."

"It is God's way," she answered him.

"Seems like a miracle — raising from the dead. Why don't ministers preach about such things?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

He put the infant beech into the ground reverently, and they strolled into damp sylvan depths, over slippery paths of enamelled pine-needles, through clumps of hemlock growing dark and thick as spruce; they chased wood-calls with Watch; but everywhere 'Lisbeth saw the beech shoot, and heard, undertoning the sighing forest, "Frost, wind, storm, fire." Indeed, she had been bitten by His cold, tossed underneath shifting sorrows by His winds, drenched by His storm; would she be brought up again by His immortal fires, resurrected to earthly sunshine? She found no answer in the silent sky that domed the world, though she questioned till they started homeward.

She wandered dreamily toward home, till, coming down near the schoolhouse, suddenly Tom cried out, —

"The King, the King!"

Sure enough, he was coming towards them from the pasture on a dog-trot, as if he had no absences to account for, everything seeming usual. The children ran

to meet him, and then with the dogs flew over the hill toward home and back again opposite 'Lisbeth into the lower field.

She gladdened at sight of King David, rough, but abiding as the hills he loved, and faithful as the star which set his compass. With an indefinable awkward grace, the outcome of an innate chivalry, he inquired, —

“How be you, 'Lisbeth?”

“Uncle David, you cannot tell how we have missed you and the dogs.”

“Have you now? Mebbe your father has tew, we're gener'ly coon-huntin' through his corn.”

Both laughed, for coon-hunting was a sore subject to Farmer Wilson.

“But where have you been?”

“'Lisbeth, this chatter an' tattle wore me out, an' I've made a little journey. I tole John once what I sh'd do case of some things, an' I've done it.”

He drew a brown paper parcel from his pocket, gave it to her, and was gone in a flash down the lower field after his dogs and the children.

Amazed, she took the little packet home, went quietly to her room through the east entry, undid it, found a letter, broke its seal, and read its two lines, —

“ELIZABETH, —

What I was I am and shall be. God bless you forever and ever.

JOHN MAYHEW.”

To be content without renewed assurance of his great love was serenity; to be certain of his constancy was peace. She read the letter over and over again, positive that no half-heard speeches, nor Huldah's most shivering sighs, could ever disturb her more.

She descended to find her mother and Lettice in the east room sewing and planning.

"Why, 'Lisbeth," said her mother, "how you have enjoyed your frolic with the children! You must go every day while this Indian summer lasts."

"Yes, mother; where is grandma?"

"Up to Mis' Lane's."

Lettice pushed her head out of the window, shading her eyes with an arm, and at last exclaimed, —

"Mis' Wilson! 'Lisbeth! look down in our medder. Ain't that man the King? 'Tis, I know 'tis; an' there's his dogs, true as you live."

"Yes," answered 'Lisbeth; "I saw him up by the schoolhouse, and the children ran down the ridge with him."

Both women, hearing her happy voice, turned towards her kindled face.

"Where's he been?" inquired Lettice eagerly. "What is it makes you so kinder pleased? O 'Lisbeth! has he been way down below — tew Boston?"

The girl smiled and nodded, while her face grew faintly rosy.

"Has he? My stars, we might a-knowed 'thout

tellin', for he would dew jest that. Sick of this buzzin', an' winkin', an' whisperin', I s'pose."

"'Lisbeth, did he bring any word from John?" tremulously inquired her mother.

"Nothing which breaks his promise to my father. Here is a line he sent; you and Lettice can read it while I am gone to find my sewing."

Mrs. Wilson took the letter, and having read it through a shower of tears, passed it to Lettice. When she had finished they exchanged one misty smile of thankfulness, and each woman turned her quivering face into thick nasturtium vines that swayed blossoming over the window-sill by which she sat.

CHAPTER XXXI

PARISH VISIT

Not long after Mr. King's return, Mr. Baker drove out one day, walked down into the field and chatted a while with the farmer where he was breaking up, and went away, taking 'Lisbeth with him.

"Marthy won't so much as ask for the horse, an' take 'Lisbeth to school herself," he muttered, and immediately felt aggrieved, or as if a light had gone out, or an east wind come up, chilling to the marrow. Certainly his boys and Mr. Tyrrell had a great deal to do

driving the oxen, for they never seemed to travel a rod in the right direction. His temper rose higher at the evening meal because emptiness asserted itself so meanly emphatic at his wife's right hand. He did not blame himself, being unconscious of fault. 'Lisbeth's folly, as he phrased it, added to her mother's and Lettice's wilful upholding of law-breaking as he viewed it, were chief, and, in fact, only causes of misery; certainly it followed no error of his; but he did question himself anxiously as to how long those three women, yes, three, — Lettice was worst of the lot, — would sting him with such barbed shafts.

After supper that evening a peculiar disquieting hush which abides in rooms where the central spirit is ill-tempered settled down. Lettice enjoyed Mr. Wilson's discomfort more than she deemed quite proper, and nodded to the tea-caddy as she went to the dresser, whispering, —

“The way of the transgressor *is* hard.”

Though she hardened her heart to him, she pitied the mother, so pale and worried.

“Don't fuss over him a mite, Mis' Wilson; for he's bound tew be crosser 'n a bear, an' 'tain't no use. These spells 'll dew him good; let him alone; he oughter ache, an' he'll have smarter twinges 'n this.”

“It seems pretty bad thorning anybody so, Lettice.”

“He's thornin' himself. If he don't like it, he can stop any time. You an' I have got tew stan' on his

highheadedness, if he does squirm, or kill 'Lisbeth. That is our stent, an' we ain't goin' tew give in not so much as tew stan' on one foot instid of both. I'm feared we sha'n't save her after all, but we can dew our best."

"Lettice, we must do our duty; but I feel as I have coming in out of a cold storm, and raking the ashes open to find every spark gone out — so tired and numb and bewildered."

"Yes, ma'am, I hain't a doubt on't, but that don't signify; we're both on us pullin' full as heavy a load as he is, an' we can't shirk it. If the fire was out, there was flint and tinder tew start another, or you borrered some of a neighbor. Don't worry a minit."

When they returned to sewing he flirited his chair backward, and complained, —

"I s'pose we air out of candles, an' I sh'd like to know where my this week's *Patri't* is."

In spite of such brave talk, he walked to the east window, and peered out on the stony road over which his child had gone.

Shortly after Thanksgiving, when the snowy roads were smooth and hard, neighboring women ran into Mrs. Wilson's one day to consult as to a parish visit and sewing-bee at their pastor's.

Mrs. King said she and her husband planned to go, for their children liked Mr. Ward. David thought the minister needed a new sleigh-wrap, being round so

much visiting schools and sick people; so she and the girls had sewn some gray fox-skins together, and lined them with warm flannel, dyed logwood color set with alum.

Mrs. Harmon had not talked it over at home enough to be quite sure about it, but would be glad to give most anything not agreed upon by others. She, Phil, and Eunice were going. Aunt Seth was positive she should take along half a web of fine linen sheeting; and Mrs. Lane had put by seven towels, nicely hemstitched, for the purpose.

The next morning Mrs. Wilson said to her husband, —

“You are planning to attend the bee and donation, I s’pose.”

“Yes; I calc’late to carry three or four bushels of wheat. Mother and Mr. Tyrrell can see to things, so you an’ Lettice both better go.”

“Well, then, Lettice, we better heat the brick oven hot enough for pies and cake this morning, and to-morrow early we can put in two beef roasts; one we’ll take, it will keep warm, and the other will be for mother and the children. You can make up a couple of one-two-three-four cake, and put in rose leaves for spice. This afternoon you may bake our tart shells in the tin baker, they brown nicer so; and this evening we will pack them into my large rattan basket careful, and take our jelly along in tumblers.” So they made a holiday of preparation, conversing of homely, heartsome friends and joys.

Sleigh-bells chimed jovially next day along all roads leading to Plymouth. Ox-sleds loaded with hard wood creaked over solidly trodden snow; and other ones, covered with furs and checked blankets, drawn by three or four pairs of cattle, freighted half the grown people of one or another district from distances of several miles, passed every now and then by fleet sleighs, making music on the crisp air, or sedately plodding red pungs, the bells of whose horses chanted more quietly.

The pastor's house was early set in order, assuming an air of expectation, while a teakettle became very much excited behind the kitchen andirons, and an odorous breath of burning pine exhaled from the fore-room.

It was ten o'clock when first comers crossed the threshold, and then sleighs jogged up quite merrily for some time. Mrs. Harmon, going up-stairs to take her things off, followed by Eunice, pretty as a pink, found half a dozen women in the guest chamber.

"You are very well now, I am sure," said one of the household, who assisted her unbundling.

"Yes," said the little woman, giving her head a pretty turn to one side, "I am. Eunice has a knack for curin' sperrits an' bodies."

Truly it did seem likely, as one observed how handily the young wife removed her mother-in-law's hood, smoothed her hair, and settled a lace cap with dainty rose ribbons upon it.

"I wouldn't have you think I bought them gay rib-

bins myself; it's Eunice's dewins, an' I couldn't help it, for we are all under her thumb down tew our house. I tell father I don't know what we are comin' tew."

She glanced at Eunice in a way that showed they had already arrived at something very sweet indeed.

"We must go down and have our cloth making up," said Aunt Seth.

"Yes, we can help you," remarked Mrs. Harmon, "for we brought a firkin of butter."

Busy hands and busy tongues made light work and decorous pastime down-stairs, where their faithful pastor and his family moved among them with gracious expressions to each. It was curious to note the wondering appearance of some who paused upon the library threshold and scanned its shelves, trying to make out what manner of man their preacher was, so skilled in letters, nor once doubting his knowledge of each book from cover to cover.

A couple of neat, youngerly women, who did general sewing for families round about, superintended the work. They measured, cut, basted, turned hems, joked, and laughed after their own gentle manner.

About twenty-five people dined at two long tables laid in dining-room and library. Afterward, men who had been chopping and riving donated wood resumed their labors till two o'clock, when the house was full of sedately joyous people. One room was given up to work, the rest of the house to comers and goers.

When the Academy closed, 'Lisbeth and Lois found Eunice, and from then mild frolic followed hard after them from room to room.

N. P. Rogers, the singer and the prophet, greatly perplexed some brethren by new notions upon slavery. Aunt Seth nodded a rather assenting cap-border to his arguments, as Mr. Wilson observed, and inly vowed to make her a visit the next Wednesday evening.

Every once in a while Mr. Ward pre-empted a space in his library near a south window, talking in subdued tones to one or another who needed advice, correction, consolation, or sympathy.

He discerned that Mr. Wilson held no speech with 'Lisbeth, nor did she once regard him, and he thought she studiously avoided being near her father; in fact, they seemed as strangers.

He was pained and somewhat angered, but made no sign of his watchful oversight, and was pleased to see, that in the exchange of news, the rustle of silk against homespun, and recalling of many memories, the occurrence passed unnoticed.

Hitty Stearns, whose tongue prevented her from being installed as a mistress of seams, — for the pastor would not countenance her so far, — cornered Aunt Seth about the middle of the afternoon.

“They dew say for certain, Mis' Batchelder, that John Mayhew is goin' tew bring a gal home next spring.”

"A Mis' John?"

"Yes."

"He's a right tew; we can't dispute that."

"But think of 'Lisbeth."

"Surmises an' surmises. Good deal we know, for there ain't a closer-mouthed family livin' on the face of this earth than the Wilsons."

"Look at her this minit, by that winder. I say she's a'most cryin'."

There was a painful tug at Aunt Seth's heart; for it was a cast-down figure sure enough that she saw all by itself, but in a moment it flitted gayly away with one of the Hobart girls. She replied to Hitty, spurred by her own deep feeling, and owning due fealty to the pious house wherein she spoke.

"Hitty Stearns, if 'Lisbeth has got any sorrer, or does have, she'll meet it with a believin' soul, alone, wrestlin' like a woman Jacob afore Isril's God; but she won't speak of it once tew you, nor tew me. She's been set for a sign of good to all hereabouts sence she was born, an' there won't be no change. Maid or wife, she'll be a token of blessing allus." She rose quickly, and took another chair beside Mrs. King and Mrs. Willoughby.

"I hain't seen you, Mis' King, sence your husband took his tramp for sellin' fur."

"Queer freak of David's runnin' round like that; but he made a good trade for his winter's ketch."

Mrs. King was uneasy. She knew the particulars of her husband's journey, and was afraid of questions. At that very instant he came in with Mr. Cummings, who was saying, —

“I hear you've been a journey.”

Every one gave strict attention; for a trip of twenty miles being a matter of town talk, one of more than three weeks made him a travelled personage.

He saw at a glance an opportunity for which he had waited since the Indian summer made way for snow. Mr. Wilson was busy visiting with Mrs. Russell and Mrs. Webster, of course he could not run; Hitty stood in the door leading to the kitchen, and would notify Huldah; 'Lisbeth was in some other room,—a most propitious union of circumstances. There was a vengeful twinkle in his eye as he answered, —

“Yes; I went down the turnpike a piece jest tew keep the dogs out of the corn. Le's set down, Mr. Cummin's. We don't want no more stagin' for one spell, though, the houn's an' me.”

“Where'd you go?”

“Tew Boston.”

“Boston! Why didn't you start for the moon?”

“I hain't never hunted thereaway. Ye see, I wanted tew bargain for this winter's furs, an' I kinder hankered tew see John Mayhew.”

He slung one leg over the other, and winked hard at the ceiling above Mr. Wilson's head.

"I s'pose he's changed a good deal," piped Hitty, beside herself with curiosity.

"Yes, Hitty, 'sponsibleness gives a master strong twist tew a man. He's a high-steppin' critter, that's a fac'. I told him some of our folks heerd he was a-comin' home nex' spring with a bran' new wife."

"Is he?" peremptorily demanded Hitty.

"Not less he gits some new idees 'tween now an' then. But, Mr. Cummin's, we went everywhere; tew furriers an' gunsmiths; but the last thing beat Bunker Hill."

"What was it?"

"The all-firedest mess of stuff as ever was put together, cars they call 'em,—tew ride in ye know,—pullin' done by steam."

"I see about it in our paper," said Mr. Hobart, who was progressive; "an' I sorter thought 'twould be a good thing if it'll go."

"Go! go! I guess they go. You oughter see 'em 'hyper.' John he took me tew the deepo',—a house they comes intew,—an' soon I heerd a buzzin' an' spit-tin' down the railroad, sounded some like a meet'n of bears an' wile-cats; then the train come roun' a corner an'—well—I ain't skeert at nothin', but I kinder hung back when that black critter tore along intew the deepo' so proud an' grand an' all-fired business like. 'Twas a reg'lar 'git out the way ole Dan Tucker' performance. I don't want tew see any more of 'em long as I live."

“Any folks git out of ’em?”

“Yes; I’ll bet more ’n tew stage loads, or three mebbby.”

“How big be they?”

“Nigh the size of this foreroom, not quite so wide an’ a leetle longer.”

“Didn’t you even step inside?”

“No, *sir*. John tried tew have me jump on one of the blamed things; said ’twar on’y drawn back tew the extry car-shed; but I tole him, no, I didn’t care a cent whether they was goin’ back or for’ards, they’d dew it ’thout me.”

“There ain’t no steam in the cars.”

“You see, fire, an’ water, an’ steam air all harnessed up by themselves, an’ sep’rit in the ingen. It’s got a great fire-oven and biler behind it that looks some like a barril on its side, but longer, an’ out of the biler, or oven, or somethin’, runs a big chimbley. The cars air hooked onto this ingen.”

“Does it look hansum?”

“Humbly, humbliest thing I ever see, black an’ stubbed, and kinder devilish when it’s fired up, — that’s what they call it when the wood’s in an’ sparks a-flyin’, — an’ there’s a crooked arm on each side that reaches an’ reaches ready tew grab, and it hisses like a million sarpunts — well, I kep’ outen the way.”

The women exclaimed, but the men winked at each other, and said nothing. Finally one inquired, —

"Does it make any noise?"

"Cracky, you oughter hear it! Rumbles louder'n twenty wagons over the ledge close tew Mr. Lane's. Then it whistles. Whew! you've heerd steam come outen a big coal pit—it's nothin' tew it, nothin'; an' you've heerd dinner horns. Nabby'll blow ourn ahead of anybody I ever see, but that thing'll whoop louder'n forty toots put together. I couldn't help laughin', thinkin' of the wile critters, an' how they would scatter an' scrabble if it should ever come this way."

Mrs. Bartlett remarked, when amaze had somewhat subsided, that it was nearly time to go home. Mr. Ward called the choir together; and, after singing, he prayed long and fervently for his departing flock. He requested Mr. Wilson to remain until other good-bys were spoken, and they were closeted together before harnessing.

Lettice, worn out from piloting butter, meat, and vegetables down cellar, blankets and linen up-stairs, to say nothing of visiting, concluded to stay at Squire Baker's until Sabbath day.

CHAPTER XXXII

MR. WILSON'S ILLNESS

WINTER sped along over the Wilson district in rather sober fashion; for the sparkle had partly died out of spelling and singing schools, Eunice being married, Ruth lonesome, and 'Lisbeth gone. To be sure, the Lanes were lighter-hearted than usual, anticipating John's return. The sweet house-mother busied herself with some alterations in John's room, putting up new curtains, painting the basket-stuff chairs anew, polishing the little lightstand, and so on, all and several of which changes she narrated at Mr. Wilson's, to his perfect misery; but there was nothing to do except groan in the spirit and keep silence.

The outcroppings of a general desire to see John were his most nettling harassment, for the whole neighborhood was broken in upon by expectation to such a degree that even his most vital arguments with Aunt Seth were disjoined by queries as to whether John would return at sugar time or wait for settled weather.

The King also was quite content. His hounds bayed up mountain sides, their deep cry resounded from thick woods, the tall figure of their master loped from covert to covert. A long series of bright, crisp days led up to

Candlemas, when a threatened thaw withdrew its heralds, and damp snow covered everything close as banded wool. Sleet followed during the night; and the King arose to find every tree and shrub, every level and hill, robed in vestments of flawless crystal over a swathe of snow.

It was the free and unlimited coinage of silver, but the fires in which it was smelted and the dies in which it was struck remain a secret of Omnipotence.

The very inmost spirit of the hills throbbed in the hunter's soul when he pulled a curtain aside and beheld that northern pageant.

Hurrying breakfast, he was speedily equipped. In the heel taps of his fur boots were projecting nail-heads, that took firm hold of the crust; the dogs' claws failed oftener than they. Diving into the opposing forest, he tramped eastward by brook and glen, past bridges whose stringers and floors were spun silver; by fairy grottoes more wonderful than Eastern imageries; by falls over which frolicking waters leaped and sang, domed by crystal canopies.

He climbed Smith Hill through woods beyond the farther dwelling, and kept on to Bridgewater meeting-house, where the northland spread before him up, —

“The winding vales of the Pemigewassett,”

straight ahead over Campton's beautiful hills, to the far horizon and the Presidential range of mountains.

"I never took tew Injun's, pups," he said, "but they knew a thing or so 'bout names. 'Waumbek Methna,' they called 'em, 'Mountings of the snowy forrids,' an' that's jest what they are. I wonder what it'll be when sunset comes an' them hills color up, — some like our roses an' laylocks."

He strolled along from point to point until nearly noon; then he scraped part of a boulder clean, and sat down close under a low spruce, where he commanded a wide level landscape, hemmed in by forest, that sparkled as a sea of silver strewn with jewels. His simple mind discerned in it some faint semblance to the sea of glass mingled with fire.

"Beats all, pups. To-day is cap-sheaf, an' we won't see another like it if we live forty year. Le's have a morsel of meat."

He sat a long time, indeed till late afternoon, listening to the cadence of bells from far roads, while nearer, twigs snapped, branches fell, or an old growth tree, too heavily weighted with splendor, crashed thundering down.

After a while he rose, threw the gun upon his shoulder, and called to his dogs, "Mazin, Mazin, come, we'll go home; we hain't seen nary a brush nor heerd a chirrup, but I'm glad we see sech a sight as this."

An hour after, when almost in view of home, he was startled by a loud, resolute sounding of Mrs. King's dinner-horn. Harkening intently, he heard it again waking the echoes. Another equal interval, and three

long, swift notes rang clear and challenging. Clasp-
ing his gun with one arm, he put his hands together and
blew an answering whistle. "Trouble; 'tain't Nabby,
for nobody livin' can toot like that 'cept her; must be
one of the childern." He made a bee line home, turning
his gun into a jumping-pole over hollows, striking a
seven-league gait across levels, tugging and hauling by
limb and shrub up steep banks, till he saw his wife, and
David with a handsled, running to meet him, and he in-
quired breathlessly, —

"Is it one of the gals — Lucy?"

"'Tain't us; it's the Wilsons."

"Who? nobody dead, Nabby?"

"'Twouldn't be no use tootin' if they was. Mr. Wil-
son has been pooty bad all night an' wuss to-day. They
want 'Lisbeth an' the doctor, an' not a hoss sharp-shod
tew keep from tumblin' down, first step."

"I'm glad you brought my i'un shod sled, Dave.
Here, take this gun an' empty bag an' see tew the dogs,
Nabby; mebbe you'll find a cut or tew in their feet, an
they're hungry."

"Don't worry 'bout nothin'. I 'spect that horn did
give ye a pooty sharp turn."

Mr. King wheeled, and in less than ten minutes en-
tered the Wilsons' east room, where grandma sat pale as
ashes, and Lettice was gray with waiting.

"I'm here; what's up; is he pooty sick?"

"Desprit bad, an' growin' wuss; some kind of a

fever, I'm cert'in. He took cold in the rain, and was sick all night."

"What's wanted?"

"Doctor an' 'Lisbeth; but it is nigh sundown; can you go?"

"Go! I've got tew go; give me a bite, Lettice, right in my hand. I've got my i'un runner, an' it 'll go quicker 'n a hoss. My sled 'll jest whizz over this glare crust, an' carry clear from one hill tew another. I'll start the doctor less 'n forty minutes."

The old lady counted every minute on the dial, going from chair to window and back. Two hours lacking a quarter, and the King said in two hours Dr. Good would come. What if he were away from home? Five slow-ticking moments passed and still five more. Lettice lighted the lantern, so the boys might be ready to put up the hard-driven horse. All the children joined in that silent watch; but only once did a stricken face look out of the forerom door, whither they had carried the sick man. One, two, three more—a faint jingle of bells, a team flying down the crusty school-house hill, and immediately the doctor entered with a cheery good-evening, and a heartsome air as if nothing serious had happened or would happen, rubbed and warmed his chill fingers, and crossed the entry to the sick-room.

"There, 'tain't half so bad as 'twas," said Lettice. "I declare for't, a good doctor is near enuff tew an angil tew suit me. We'd better flax round an' git a

good supper for him; an' it'll seem kinder incurigin' tew 'Lisbeth if the table's set, an' teakittle bilin', when she comes."

Only a clean cloth and a few plates were on before Mr. Baker drove up with 'Lisbeth and Mr. King, whose "i'un runner" was fast to the sleigh. When Dr. Good returned, he cheered them some, saying, —

"Well, Mr. Wilson is in for a long pull, I reckon, good deal of fever and bad tongue. I've given him a blue pill, and shall bleed him to-morrow unless he is better."

"Fever, did you say? Thomas never has fevers," said dame Wilson; but her dominance was gone, fearing the conqueror of all born of women.

"One's enough. Kind? Rheumatic probably; but he has a wonderful constitution, and I expect him to weather it. Lettice is a good nurse, one of the best; besides, there is Mrs. Lane and Aunt Seth. Good neighborhood to be sick in."

"Doctor, will it be long?"

He wheeled to see a girl whose cloak had half-fallen from her shoulders, resolutely holding Tom and Dorothy to her heart; he also perceived that an intrepid and helpful soul questioned him through those pale lips.

"'Lisbeth! why, bless my heart, how came you here? I'm glad to see you, for here is a chance to set a girl thinking of something besides frills and furbelows."

"Will it be long, very long, indeed?" pleaded she drearily.

"Long? H'm, yes, 'Lisbeth; this fever takes hold for a whole stent;" he went close and patted her head, "but your stent and mine lasts equally with his. You are to see we don't lose heart, and be spare hand all round, and I hope your father will be out in season for spring's work. Now I'm going to wait till Lettice brews tea; you better learn her knack; capital."

After supper he went away, forbidding water to his patient, and trebly cautioning against one breath of air from doors or windows; and so it went on for four long weeks. Mr. Wilson lay there full of pain, parched, throbbing, almost motionless, indebted to that big, blessed fireplace for any hint of healthful atmosphere; then Dr. Good announced a change imminent.

The fever died down to smouldering embers, staying so, as if a breath might fan them into flames again along those tortured arteries. Then some poison touched his brain, so he noted nothing for two weeks more, but grew whiter and thinner day by day.

'Lisbeth had watched him all along during hours of sleep; but when he ceased to know who tended at any time, she kept her place almost continuously. Mrs. Lane and Mrs. Batchelder spent most of the time there, and Mr. King hovered round the house constantly. The doctor ordered a curtain up, hoping sunbeams might rouse him.

Sometimes the patient quickly raised his restless head as though trying to make sure of some half-understood

sound, and immediately was lost again. At last, one night when Mrs. Lane and 'Lisbeth watched, about midnight he stirred uneasily and faintly whispered, "'Lisbeth."

She was beside him, and bent over; saying softly, "I am here, father."

A feeble smile flitted over his wan visage, but it seemed like that of a sleeping child.

"O father! my father!" sobbed the girl; and Mrs. Lane led her out and soothed her to sleep, after calling Mrs. Wilson and Aunt Seth.

When she entered the east room the next morning it was flooded with sunshine; a meek thankfulness clothed dame Wilson; and Lettice's eyes were swollen with tears, yet she was humming, "I bless the Lord, he heard my cries;" and grandma, unrepining, kept time with her foot.

"How is father?" she asked anxiously.

"Better; he knows your mother an' all of 'em."

"Since when, Lettice?"

"Well, soon after you went up-stairs, it seems he begun to sleep easy, grew moist an' cool, stayin' so till past daybreak. Jest as the sun riz he opened his eyes an' called, 'Marthy,' an' spoke tew the others, then slep' ag'in, so it's goin' on. I carried him a cup of crust coffee ten minits ago, an' he seemed like himself, on'y weak as a rat."

The King sauntered in saying, —

"Here, Lettice, here's some bran new eggs mother sent. Ye see, 'Lisbeth, I come up once afore this mornin'. It's all right. The dogs an' me are startin' on a tramp."

'Lisbeth sank into a chair. Living, he became dead to her, he would no longer tolerate her loving ministrations. Between them a soundless, invisible wall had risen, even his mighty will. But he was better, life was returning slowly, and how thankful she was; yes, utterly blessed, for death had not set the seal of eternal silence at the sepulchre door of a father's dead affection, and vital sense being restored, hope for renewal of loving favor was revived also. Still, the folding of hands that had been so swift and busy would be very hard; and what time must one wait, if, indeed, relenting should ever come? Lettice, divining her thoughts, said, —

"There, now, you've been cooped up a long spell; an' I shouldn't wonder a mite nor grain if you could find mayflowers a'most out on the oak knoll, down below the ridge. You eat breakfast, an' then take a good long run. I'll call the boys an' Dorothy."

"But, Lettice, are you sure he has not wandered since?"

"Wandered! good land, no; he's clear as a whistle, noticed how full an' red the buds air, an' smiled at a robin's chatter in the cherry tree. He couldn't draw a very straight furrer, nor help Mr. Tyrrell pitch corn

stalks from the high beams; but that don't signify, he eat all the breakfast we dast give him an' wanted more, — a roast tater or sumthin."

"You better dew as Lettice says soon's you're through breakfast," added the dame in a pacific tone, the threat absent from her cap-border.

"Here's the childern an' your things. Boys, you want Watch tew bark at the fox holes, I s'pose; call him."

Rebuilding, recreating power vivified the air, burst from the sod, swelled tree and bush, as they went forth. Where 'Lisbeth's foot crushed thin frost-panes over little hollows, there green grass blades sprang beneath such tiny hot-bed frames, and by brook banks fern fronds were unrolling at the sunny foot of warming rocks. She was blessed, comforted, the more so as one tenderly harbored fancy housed itself in her mind, — what if her father did realize when he said "'Lisbeth," at midnight, ah, surely.

For three days thereafter the doctor rubbed his hands more and more gleefully at each visit. "Sha'n't come again for two days, Mrs. Wilson. We can't keep him in bed much longer; nothing but restlessness ails him now."

The fifth day he was made ready to receive the doctor in state. Another thick curtain was rolled up, letting in the full, healing sunbeams.

"You certainly look like yourself, Thomas," said his

wife ; and he smiled up to her so lovingly as to recall a far distant memory.

" Yes, I am weak ; but life has come back, I feel sure of that."

His eyes wandered to a pitcher of pussy willows, whose furry buds seemed to have crawled up the red stems into sunshine, and to some half-opened mayflowers, flinging sweet odors from tinted cups.

" Who picked them, Marthy ? "

" The childern," and she started to go out.

" Come back here, mother." Then, after a pause, " Did 'Lisbeth come home ? "

" Yes, Thomas," she replied, trembling.

" When ? "

" A few minutes after the doctor."

" That first night ? "

" Yes."

" I hain't heard her singin', an' I s'pose she's gone back 'fore now."

She wondered if that was why he was uneasy. Did he wish her out of the house, or in it ?

No questions could be asked ; and she tremblingly answered, —

" No ; she is at home."

" Where is she now ? "

" Winding flax on the distaff."

" Has she been in here—much ? "

" Yes."

"Was she here when I woke out of that terrible dream, an' fell into the sleep that saved me?"

"She was here till after midnight; you were sleeping sweetly when I came in — but there, father, you mustn't talk."

She shook from head to foot; but her husband closed his eyes restfully, and remained silent till the door opened. Then he said, —

"Come right in, Lettice. I'm tired waitin' for that broth, an' I hope the bowl's full."

After partaking of the food, he said, —

"There, now, you both go out, an' send 'Lisbeth in."

"Why, Thomas, the doc" —

"Send 'Lisbeth in, Marthy." Both women were amazed, but Lettice rose to the occasion.

"'Twon't hurt him a mite, Mis' Wilson. Yes, I'll find her," she nodded to the sick man, and led his wife out by the sleeve.

"Don't worry 'bout it, Mis' Wilson; it'll be wuth all the doctor's stuff, and all the roots an' arbs in our ole garrit tew boot."

Half an hour later the doctor drove briskly up, and ran in.

"How's our — why, Lettice, what's happened? Is Mr. Wilson worse?"

"It's my 'pinion, Dr. Good, he's better this blessid mornin' than he's been for years, an' I don't know but allus. But I'm most 'fraid he'll die, an' I s'pose I better tell you jest how 'tis."

So she related briefly the history of those years so full of pain, adding, "Her mother an' me we opened the door a few minits ago; she looked like an angil if ever there was one, an' her father was sleepin', paler but quiet. Either he's goin' tew die, or else he has made a sin-offerin' for his soul, cordin' tew Scriptor." Tears rained down the poor maid's face, but the doctor was relieved.

"I knew he was fretting, and it was this that kept him back. The morning's work will do him good, I'll be bound; don't worry. I'm going to Mrs. Smith's, and will be back in an hour or so; let him sleep."

CHAPTER XXXIII

FATHER BENSON CALLS ON MR. WILSON

No other syllable was ever spoken in the house concerning the unnatural silence between those two, and none ever knew what passed between father and daughter in the forerom that April morning. 'Lisbeth was radiant; the old rippling laughter returned, and low sounds of hymns and ballads followed her from room to room; yet there was a hint of pathetic wistfulness, which one always wears after shadow and sorrows fall. It is a sign manual testifying that some time love has failed or hope been wrecked. She prepared her father's

noon repast as if it were a matter of course, and carried the refreshment to him with such demure happiness as did one's heart good to see.

"Here is a fresh egg, and a piece of toast. Lettice contributes the least bit of jelly, and the doctor says you are to have a chicken's wing tomorrow."

He grew rapidly better, and took counsel with the squire as to crops and stock. By the last of May he walked slowly into the near fields once in a while, but lived out of the house, sitting in his great rocking-chair placed on a bear skin that covered grass prinked out with dandelion blossoms and shaded by the blue-damson tree. Here in his front yard, with grandma knitting beside him, he watched 'Lisbeth and her mother sow four-o'clock and morning-glory seeds, make new house-leek beds, transplant roses and ladies' delights, and trim lilacs. Here also, beside him, 'Lisbeth's linen wheel hummed through fair afternoons, and his wife set long delayed stitches. One day he told Mrs. Wilson and 'Lisbeth that he had requested Squire Baker to ask Father Benson if he would call on his way to Conference, which met in June. He had been unjust to the circuit-rider, he said, and harsh in speech concerning him and his calling; so both women rightly guessed Mr. Wilson desired to atone for such perverseness. 'Lisbeth fixed her gaze upon the Pond, and a hope, like the first tiny bud of spring, swelled in her heart. Perhaps some day he would make reparation for a greater fault. She

remembered when he sent for her he took all blame to himself, but she recollected also that not a single breath concerning John escaped his lips. She sighed, and went into the house.

Not long after, near noon, as 'Lisbeth read to her father, the dappled gray, bearing his martial rider, trotted carefully down schoolhouse hill. He thrust his ears forward inquiringly when the drawing rein turned him towards the unaccustomed house; but he cantered gayly up to the invalid, nodded his head, blinked his eyes, and champed his bit, as saying, —

“My master reins me hither. I must needs come, but am very puzzled about it.”

“Good-morning, brother,” spoke the sweet-voiced preacher, throwing himself from the saddle, “are you much better?”

“I’m nigh well. 'Lisbeth, call the boys to take care of the horse. Won’t you sit down here? I like bein’ out of doors.”

'Lisbeth pulled some clover heads for the horse as she returned, which he took, gratefully whinnying.

“It is comin’ noontime, an’ we shall be glad to have you take dinner with us if you will.”

The preacher’s deep eyes glowed.

“I shall be pleased to break bread with you, but I must be gone soon after. Conference meets in ten days, and I have matters of importance on the road between here and Lynn.”

"'Lisbeth, tell your mother Mr. Benson will take dinner with us."

Lettice heard the message, and straightway went to the window, impressed that age had dulled her hearing; but there was Father Benson in plain evidence.

"Well, I'm beat," said she to her friend, Mary Symons; "'tis Father Benson, sure as you live, an' Mr. Wilson has fit and contended, an' sot his foot down that he never ort tew darken an orthodox door. I dew wonder what next. Seems tew me rumatiz clears up some like a thunder shower."

'Lisbeth did not return to them, knowing her father would wish to be alone. Serious tones gave place to lighter ones, and, going to bring them in to dinner, 'Lisbeth found her sire enjoying stories of perilous and laughable adventure; for his guest possessed much charm as a narrator, allied to grace and courage in the exercise of his holy calling.

After dinner the circuit-rider asked leave to pray, which he did with such uplifting fervor and childlike faith, such perfect trust and absolute nearness to Almighty Love, as blessed the members of that household to their lives' end. Then he sung, —

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love."

Father Benson promised to repeat his visit as he came back; for, his field of labor being farther away, oppor-

tunities for visiting Mr. Wilson would be infrequent. Then he went away saying to himself, —

“How he has grown in grace, blessed be God.” And the farmer, watching the horseman disappearing behind the little barn, thought, “Verily, Christ’s spirit dwells in him, though his creed is so wrong and upsetting.”

Mr. Wilson joyfully anticipated Father Benson’s return, which occurred the last of June, when they walked the fields together till late afternoon, the minister being obliged to leave only in season to reach West Plymouth by early candlelight, where he would preach the Word to the flock he once shepherded.

The next week, about the middle of one afternoon, Mr. Wilson was very anxious about his paper. Work drove, but he could not be disappointed; so he remarked to his wife, —

“This is Thursday; our paper comes to-day. We need the boys, an’ ’Lisbeth better go for it if you don’t want her. Besides, I’m lookin’ for a package she can bring better ’n they.”

“She will be glad to go; and I want to send an errant to Mis’ Harmon’s, ’bout a reed. She can call coming back.”

“The stage will leave that package to the blacksmith’s, same as the paper, ’Lisbeth,” said he, as she came out, clad in a blue-and-white linen dress, with a piece of lace coming from under her half-high bodice and run into a ruffle close about her throat by blue ribbon. He ob-

served her anxiously, as she went down over the little barn hill, and seemed restless when she disappeared; indeed, he was so always, even if she but journeyed from room to room. Lettice, near by, rapped her snuff box and nodded to Mrs. Wilson, saying, —

“I’ve seen folks traipsin’ roun’ on thistles, or tryin’ tew ’fore now; but, judgin’ by eyesight, they’re fur from comf’table.”

“I’ll go down an’ see Mr. Tyrrell ’bout helpin’ Mr. Lane with his hayin’ to-morrer, Marthy, ’fore ’Lisbeth gits back with our paper.”

She soon reached the broken level that ran past Mr. King’s into the woods. She pulled her calash off, and, full of glad young life, sprang along between rows of waxing verdure sprinkled with myriad wayside blooms. Bees murmured among bending clovers, and humming-birds drew honied stores from deep flower chalices. Every nook, even the air itself, was full of vigorous life and echoing melody. The forest shadows were cool and grateful as she entered them, and the beautiful hemlocks were tipped as to each twig with tufts of vivid green; beech and oak swung their light foliage to the breeze. Woven amongst the verdancy swayed heavy white heads of moosewood blooms, and underfoot were violets of many hues, and delicate ferns. A few rods into the woods a short sandy hill descended to a stony, full-banked brook, crossed by a heavy plank bridge. The gully was deep and very cool, and the waters mur-

mured fondly to their banks bordered with moss and fern. Squirrels chattered gayly as they whisked back and forth upon the lichened stringers, hiding for a second in tall brakes growing at either end. She gathered her hands full of violets and partridge-vines, and drew herself to a seat on a great rock beside a stringer, to knot them and think of him who loved her, and who also delighted in those exquisite growths of woody dells. The King's averment that he "was John, jest John," was comforting, though he was far from that glorious budding and blossoming, that blithe trilling of nesting birds and song of falling waters.

If he would come then, she reasoned, while Mr. Wilson's conciliatory habit lasted and unwonted benignity held mastery, surely justice would be rendered to them. The tares of the evil one might choke the gracious crop which was surely breaking through the storm-swept soil of her father's heart. Ought she not to hasten his coming by sending a message, if the King would undertake it, and tell him now was the favored time to draw hitherward? The cumbering reverie was so deep, she heard no footsteps down the opposite sandy incline, nor noticed a youth who strode eagerly to the bridge, then stopped, arrested by a figure seated in such a patient, waiting attitude upon a rock. For a moment, it seemed as if not only motion, but breath itself, was hushed in him; then a great light shone in his face, and he pulled his cap off and strode forward. A swift foot-

fall smote her ear as it struck the bridge, yet she hardly collected her mind enough to marvel what neighbor came up and crossed the bridge with such fleet strides. Suddenly she raised her eyes to see, then slipped from the rock, scattering vines and violets round her feet. Mechanically she put a hand above her eyes as if to clear their vision, then clasped them in the old way and leaned forward wonderingly.

"'Lisbeth," he called, swinging his cap. Yes, it was he, her lover, John, his chestnut hair, his matching eyes; yet an air of great humility stole into his manner as he approached her.

"'Lisbeth, my love; 'Lisbeth."

Slowly she raised a hand and touched his face, whispering his name.

"But, 'Lisbeth," he asked after a while, "why are you so surprised to see me?"

"Surprised? why, because you wrote to Mrs. Lane you were not coming."

"That was before I heard."

"I cannot understand anything about it."

"Did you not come to meet me? I thought so. Sit down on the rock again, — don't tremble so, — and tell me where you were going."

"To Brainard's corner, for father's paper."

"I have it. I remembered it was due to-day."

"You?"

"Yes, I recollected to-day is Thursday."

“Taking it to him?”

“Certainly, provided I remember it after reaching the house.”

“Oh, I was to bring a package too; I forgot it.”

Light dawned upon the young man when the perplexed girl made that statement.

“What sort of a bundle was this?”

“I don’t know.”

“But you were to take it home?”

“Yes.”

“My dear, what if I am the bundle?”

“You? No, he sent for this one.”

“He sent for me.”

“Sent? — my father — sent for you?”

“He did, ’Lisbeth, by Father Benson; or, rather, commanded my immediate presence here. He knew I was coming on this afternoon stage; that is, if Father Benson has returned from Conference.”

“He has, but what has he to do about you? Why don’t you explain things to me?”

“What I know is this: your uncle requested Father Benson to call at your house on his way to Conference. He did so; and your father asked him to find me and say that he wished me to come home immediately, and here I am.”

“Oh, dear me, John, I don’t see how it is,” said she, smoothing her forehead in a puzzled fashion.

“If you will kindly take me to your father, perhaps

he can explain, and I am sure your errand will be done."

"But why didn't father" —

"Never mind; we will inquire if I am the expected bundle. Easy enough to take me back and exchange, you know."

They went hand in hand out of the forest. As they reached a point opposite the King's gate, dame King saw them from where the family sat at table.

"Good land, who's that? 'Lisbeth, ain't it? Yes; but who under the sun is that feller? My stars, David," rushing to the door, "I do b'leve — you come here, quick, ain't that" —

"Yis, 'tis; 'tis jest him." Mr. King was out at one bound. "Hi, whoop, hoo-oo-o-o," he whistled through his hands. John swung his hat, and sent a happy hello adown the orchard. The women waved their aprons, the dogs barked, and Mrs. King suggested, —

"Le's cut acrost the orchard an' speak tew him over the fence;" but her husband knowingly replied, —

"There's folks nuff out in the road, Nabby; you ain't needed."

There was no make believe or acting between the two men when they met; both were clear-cut, honest, Christian, and they greeted each other as such men would. When John hastened to meet Mr. Wilson, who was going towards him ('Lisbeth ran in at the east door), the stern man, aged and mellowed by his journey to the very marge of eternal boundaries, heartily said, —

"I'm glad you've come, John; and you're kindly welcome, else I shouldn't sent. I can't say but I should be better pleased if 'Lisbeth was goin' to marry some man of our own denomination; but she ain't, an' can't. There's nothin' changin' 'bout 'Lisbeth, an' I've been so close to eternity that I realize it'll take mor'n creeds to save a soul."

The young man choked, and clung speechless to the thin hand, looking away to Sugarloaf, whose shadow before the lowering sun came well nigh across the Pond. At that moment the tissue of earthly living fell apart, and the substance of immortal existence became real; he confronted and understood his own heart's faithful devotion, and the mightier, holier mystery of Divine Love. He recognized also the grandeur of Mr. Wilson's character, and the benignity of his yielding; and he answered very slowly,—

"You know me; what I have been, I am. At least, I can hereafter be no less than now; but I am not worthy of her—no man could be that; still, I may say, and ought to say, that I have kept free from every folly, determined to bring to this day, that I knew was coming, all the manhood with which God endowed me."

"I have no fear for her or you," answered Mr. Wilson, proudly scanning the splendid youth.

"But, Mr. Wilson, whether this blessing comes through foreordination or free will, I am equally thankful."

"It stands to my reason and conscience that it is foreordained, John; but here comes mother an' Lettice an' the boys, they're all glad."

"Speakin' of merrycles," said Lettice to Tom, as she swung up the tin baker cover to look at the biscuit browning before the fire, "'tain't no use to deny 'em — I do hope there ain't a grain tew much sal'ratus in these biscuits; you jest bring me a glass of barb'ry jell for these tarts, Tom — 'tain't no use tew deny 'em, not a mite, for there's a real live one settin' out in our front yard this minnit."

'Lisbeth made even her brothers proud, as she sat beside her father at supper, in the seat to which she was reinstated when he first broke bread with his family after those weeks of desperate illness, so shy, so constantly changing color, so comely and happy.

"I must see Aunt Nancy, Mrs. Wilson," John said. "May 'Lisbeth walk up with me? I will bring her home."

Of course she went. Reaching the half-way mark he said, —

"How fragrant the sweetbrier is, 'Lisbeth," and led her for a while to the old birch seat under the spicy canopy, then they went on again towards the little brown house whose lichened boards and shingles were so homely and so dear.

A trim figure leaned against the well-curb, bonnet in hand, facing partly from them and waiting. His heart

bounded at sight of her, and pained him a trifle too; for she looked older, and a faint shadow, unremembered, had settled on the cheery countenance. Dear little woman! how those busy brown hands had toiled for him, and how white they would become when the Master blessed them for their long, willingly wrought tasks for his little ones! Mr. Lane came round the corner and she called to him, —

“Mr. Lane, I kinder want to see how Mr. Wilson gits along, so I thought I’d slip on my bonnet and run down. Do you want me to see about the haying?”

But he paid no attention, regarding something beyond her with amazement. She started towards him.

“What is the matter? Are you sick?”

“Jest look behind you;” and she did.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE END

LONG before dark the next day the whole neighborhood was rejoicing because John Mayhew had returned. It knew also that he supped at Farmer Wilson’s before going home, and that ’Lisbeth kept him company to his aunt’s at sunset, and it was glad of it.

Gossip and bickering were foreign to that soil; it was an orthodox relief, whether shared by Congregational-

ists or what not, when the time was ripe to weed out and consume them, root and branch. Huldah took snuff vehemently and thoughtfully, then went off visiting. The rest proved the adage, "All the world loves a lover," to be entirely true.

John and 'Lisbeth rode out to Plymouth next morning to visit at the squire's. As they passed each neighbor's house, its dwellers ran to the road from in-doors or field especially to greet John, honest if unspoken joy beaming from their true faces, whether under sun-bonnet or straw hat.

All who under perverse guidance had unwittingly wronged John in their silent or spoken judgment, made haste in their own quaint and quiet fashion to testify their pride in his verified manhood. And he kept to the old ways as if there had been no fault in the past. He helped Mr. Lane at odd times in the fields; stalked over Mr. Wilson's farm after haymakers and harvesters; lined bees with the King, following his long stride with boyish glee; became mediator between him and the farmers whose cornfields he and his dogs had trampled; held grandma's yarn (the cap-frill had become strangely pacific); sat with his aunt and Louisa on the garden bank by the hollyhocks, where Father Benson spent an hour so long before, and she told him of his parents, and made many wise suggestions for his new home, as she sewed or knit. As for quilting and visitings, Huldah said they were "thicker'n black-

berries; nobody couldn't do more for tew folks if they'd been Sol'mon and the Queen of Sheby."

The village people claimed part of his time, which he gladly spent merry-making there; but best of all were rambles with 'Lisbeth through cool woods on late afternoons, and homecomings in the moonlit splendor of dewy eves. What with 'Lisbeth's wedding in early October, and preparations for housekeeping afterward, it was in truth a busy summer. Lettice, as chief of happy toilers, was, as she expressed it, —

"Chock full of business? Well, I guess so. For the land's sake, merried in three months, an' not a livin' thing ready, nor a stitch sot."

After they had composed their minds, Mr. Wilson and his wife went to Plymouth to buy the wedding gowns, first consulting Mrs. Baker and Lois.

"White, Aunt Martha, for the wedding dress."

"But it will be October, Lois."

"White is the only color fit for 'Lisbeth, if 'twas January. She must have fine muslin, embroidered in apple-blossoms by Lois Baker."

Mr. Wilson listened, and added decidedly, —

"Lois is right, Marthy."

So it was bought, also a green and dark red changeable silk, which they planned to make with four breadths, short full waist, and broad belt. It must be gathered into narrow bands at the low neck, which must be filled in with lace; its large sleeves lined with calico,

for which they paid seventy-five cents a yard. The thick silk cost a dollar a yard, and would wear twenty years.

"She will need another silk gown," said her mother.

"Don't buy it to-day, Aunt Martha; you will have to buy some camlet for her dress and cloak to journey in, cloak lining, some lace, and all the other trimmings. They've got the prettiest camlet — plum-color — lovely. I've been over everything in the store."

Lois had regularly invoiced the stock of dry goods for her father, who, owning a peculiar nearness and affection for the promised bride, proposed to bestow various gifts, among others a piece of dove-colored satin sprinkled with clusters of sweetbrier roses and wood violets, which Lois' constructive genius, aided by a dressmaker, had already fashioned (she could wear her cousin's dresses) into a gown having five breadths for its short train, a short pointed bodice, low neck, to be worn with a beautiful stomacher of embroidery, high puffed sleeves, with wide frills of English lace depending from them.

"I don't see but you will have to spare Lois to us," said Mrs. Wilson, as they returned from the store. Mrs. Baker assented; and Lois presumed she should "come in very handy," shaking her bright head, and adding that she wished to stay most of the remaining time with 'Lisbeth, and so the squire carried her out a day or two after, dove-colored satin and all.

Towards evening one day, Mrs. Lane came down to see the new things, John being appointed special messenger. The goods were gently smoothed, held to the light, praised, folded, and put back again into lavender-scented drawers.

"I was coming down a minit, anyway," said she, "to tell you what John has up to our house. I'm so glad they air going to housekeeping."

"Yes," said Mr. Wilson, "'Lisbeth's always had a home of her own, an' she's goin' tew, right along, I calc'late."

"Well, I've kept his mother's things for him ; there's two large chests of linen and blankets, some of the sheets and pillowcases are plain, some hemstitched. We found towels of all kinds ; nice ones, netted, some of them, and common ones ; netted tablecloths and fringed ones, beside several plain hemmed. Loizy and I have been looking them over ; they're most as good as new, and so is her chiny, not a piece broke or cracked, nor a spoon of her silver lost, and she had a good deal besides the silver tea-set and coffee-urn John's father had fall to him."

"'Lisbeth has a good many towels, plain or bird's-eye, or fox and geese, tablecloths too ; she's knit edging, oak-leaf pattern, and other kinds for them she thought was nice enough to put any on ; one tablecloth has edging most a finger wide, and some towels have ; but Lettice is ready to spool the web we had ready when father was taken sick," answered Mrs. Wilson.

"I wouldn't weave another thread; they'll have enough to set up housekeeping for a dozen."

"I'll see what Lettice thinks. Lettice! Lettice!" she called, going towards a window as the maid came in, "Why, Lettice, isn't that" —

"Huldy? Yes, 'tis. I'm glad you called me."

"What did she want?"

"Tew peek an' squeeze in, an' have sunthin' or other tew tell on."

"I hope you minded your manners."

"Yes'm, I did," she replied dryly; "she ast me if she could dew anything tew help us; says she feels for us, with so much on our hands; an' I tole her no, I didn't b'leve there was a livin' thing more she could dew."

"Why, Lettice!"

"Law, she didn't take; she was tickled, an' went right on sayin' if we did want her jest give a hint on't, she'd come day or night."

"Did you answer properly?"

"I dunno; 'cording to what you call proper. I tole her we shouldn't need watchers probably, an' I despised hintin', an' never practised it; but if she was wanted we'd speak right up an' let her know. I s'pose Isaiah Holmes would come tew, bein' sent for; though it's as funny as ever I see or ever was, how much less 'tention cooper's timber needs this summer than it did last."

"Their fault may make them humble, Lettice."

"Humble? I guess so! They don't look much like leek eatin' critters."

“Remember the commandments, Lettice.”

“I try tew an’ mean tew, Mis’ Wilson; but as long as I live, speakin’ the name of Isaiah Holmes or Huldry Moses will set my teeth on aidge wuss’n sorrel. What did you call me for?”

“Mis’ Lane thinks we better not put in our linen web. You talk it over with her.”

The three women finally concluded there were household goods enough and to spare. Then Mrs. Lane asked, —

“Lettice, what are you going to wear at the wedding?”

“I hain’t a gown fit. I’m goin’ tew buy a new one, an’ have it made by a dressmaker. I’ve been thinkin’” — she was silent a moment before inquiring shyly, —

“Mis’ Wilson, do you an’ ’Lisbeth think I could wear silk-an-wool stuff — mouse color? I kinder want sunthin’ ’sides black.”

Lois clapped her hands, ran up-stairs, and returned bearing a bundle.

“There, Lettice, see what fuss you have saved us; mother sent the very thing you want, and we’ve been trembling for fear you’d try to change it for black, and meant you shouldn’t.”

“Why, Lois! Dear me, suz! There! This is a dretful nice piece, but how did your mother happen tew think of me?”

“That is a mystery, Lettice; but mother has queer

spells. We never mind them, or else she'd thought of the rest of us till she was tired, and remembered you to rest her. 'Lisbeth has some rose-tinted lute-string ribbon to tie your gold beads."

"Do you think I shall look well in this, 'Lisbeth," she asked, regarding the cloth lovingly.

"Certainly, else Aunt Lois would not send it; but," she added, smoothing the plain face, "you would be lovely to me in any color."

Lettice's cup was full; she burst into tears and went out.

Planning and making, packing and nailing boxes, went on till sumachs flung their crimson guidons out, waving to forest and grove, weed and quivering fern, to follow in long battalions of gold and crimson, russet and ochre.

October first was set for the marriage, and Lettice required ample time to "furnish forth the marriage feast."

Tom and Jack were warned not to appear in the kitchen, except to deposit ovenwood, after she and her assistants, Eunice and Louisa, were installed therein for festive purposes.

Lettice went from pantry to oven, to a table where Louisa crimped tart shells, to another where Eunice pounded in the mortar and sifted loaf sugar, or wherever either or both were busy, with an ever-anxious manner, from day to day.

Had that week of baking been her very first, she

might have been haunted by fewer fears, judging from the number of times she took her helpmeets to the oven, and pulled the door open a little bit, so they could "jest peek in an' see;" or with them sat in official state before receipts for compounding cake and sweetmeats, or balanced scales exactly between citron, mace, and raisins.

Many village people were invited to the wedding, and no neighbor was unasked; nor did one ever forget that glorious day,—its balmy air, and pervading sense of Sabbath peace, while the hills burned and glowed, and the Pond lay calm and silvery at their feet.

Brilliantly flowering nasturtiums climbed over brown window casings and browner clapboards. China asters and bachelor's buttons nodded demurely to arriving guests, came they afoot, in chaise, or on horseback.

Gay groups of young men and maidens kept company with fathers and mothers, who wandered over the grassy dooryards, or plucked flowers or sprigs of southernwood while awaiting the marriage service.

Women from round about, for the most part, wore homespun or stuff gowns; dames from the village dressed in taffetas or brocades, many of them fashioned for their own bridals. Love and experience had woven rich memories into those garments; they signified the fulness of a harvest home, and fittingly surrounded those two whose love was planted in hopeless furrows, throve despite tares and tempests, and that

day settled upon them for all time the wealth of its serenely garnered trust and truth.

Campton's Light Infantry Captain and Lois Baker, Richard Sleeper and Ruth, escorted the bridal couple to a place between the south windows of the foreroom. It was a satisfactory pair standing before the minister, in the hush and coolness of that sunshiny, quaint old room, at noontide, so many years ago; she so sweet and pensive, he so trustworthy and noble.

The austere ceremony was performed without a ring, but exhortation and prayer were wearily long.

When it was over, friends and neighbors closed primly around them, rejoicing, yet hearing an under-chord to their gladness, for 'Lisbeth, the beloved, was going away.

Phil and Eunice were at Lettice's right hand, obeying her every mandate from morning till night.

Upon a garlanded table under the blue-damson tree 'Lisbeth cut the bride cake.

Then followed ribbon-decked grace-hoops, battledores, and feather-full shuttlecocks, leading jolly pastime where John and 'Lisbeth moved from group to group, staying at each step for good wishes and bridal compliments. They petted her after a staid manner, smoothed her white dress, praised her proud young husband, then turned away to hide quivering lips; for it was a great journey and a far one to the foreland city by Bunker Hill. One and another of the young men essayed to

throw a grace-hoop over her head as she went by; but she blithesomely evaded all till she came where Phil and his rosy wife played against Ruth and Dick. Phil dexterously poised a hoop on the tapering grace-sticks and spun it, enringing her, its gay ribbons fluttering upon her shoulders.

Remembering her shyness, he dashed off for a swift pursuit; but she, laughing, waited his coming, and graciously, as a queen might do, held her beautiful cheek to him for a kiss, which he took reverently, as a favored subject.

All did not readily pay their forfeits; but if one demurred either at taking her own, or paying one, her partner forthwith set out to establish his privilege, and if she ran away he must needs follow, so there was mirth a-plenty; fleeing girls and their pursuers running in and out among bright plumed shuttlecocks, or hiding, full of frolic, behind sober dames. Thus they sped the time away until 'Lisbeth, for the last time, came down from her chamber overlooking the Pond, clad in plum-colored camlet, edged at neck and wrists with dimity ruffles.

A cloak of like texture and color was plaited into a narrow shoulder-yoke and hung full about her. It fastened with large silver hooks and eyes, and was lined with dark primrose silk, so was the great cape belonging to it. She wore a leghorn bonnet lined with white silk, trimmed and tied with white ribbon sprigged with plum

color. Her face showed lily fair beneath its flaring brim.

A new chaise, drawn by John's bay horse, drew up before the door. Jack and Tom broke upon the scene with some fine show of bustle, bearing by its brass handles a small, hair-covered, brass-nailed trunk which they strapped to the axle of the chaise.

Upon the trunk Lettice placed a large rattan basket, and tied its stiff handle to the axle with linen cord. It contained food for bite and sup along the journey. The whole family came out with the pair. Before them laughter changed to hopeful heartache, as one by one the dear neighbors spoke their hearty good-bys, then turned away, some not trusting themselves to look upon the grievous parting, some mournfully watching where 'Lisbeth's mother held her to her heart, and her father kept her hands in both his own.

Grandmother's cap-border was tranquil, its challenge drowned in rain, which followed the lines of age down her unwilling face. Nothing but the grave could be more silent, no agony but its own could be sharper. Finally John spoke, —

“All that a husband can be, I will be to your child.”

Thus he said to them, as he stooped and kissed the mother's forehead.

“God bless you both, for evermore,” said 'Lisbeth's father; and the minister answered, “Amen.”

Then 'Lisbeth resolutely put her hand into her hus-

band's; yet did the love-glow from her eyes beam through thick mists, as sunshine through spring floods when rain-clouds touch the hills.

The bridegroom's eyes were full, and the veins in his temples swelled out; but he made no sign, save a look of unutterable love towards his bride, another of unbounded gratitude towards those who had consented to bless his life, as he put her in the chaise, and the bay started on his journey to the sea, carrying them to found a new home where contentment, affection, and unity should dwell their whole lives long. Mr. King said to his wife in a husky voice, —

“You an' the gals will have tew stay an' talk it over a spell, I s'pose; but I'm goin' intew the woods. Hello, Spring, where be you, Watch? Come 'long; we'll mosey roun' the coon-tracks a little 'fore we go 'home,” and they all trotted toward the meadow.

The Lanes, Ruth, and Lois remained to supper; indeed, Lois was to stay some time.

“Till we kinder git over it,” Lettice said.

“'Tain't very long tew June,” observed the old lady, trying to bind up their bruised hearts with the essential oil of consolation.

Lettice, in the pantry, whither Mrs. Lane had followed, remarked dryly, —

“I guess she sees the diff'runce 'tween Boston an' Plymouth; I dew. Seems as though I should sink. I declare, when I come in here tew skim this sweet cream

for the table, I give that pan sech a jerk as nigh tipped it over right on tew my bran new dress."

She caught a glimpse of the pale mother, and stepped back into the kitchen, cheerily remarking, —

"Law, no, Mis' Wilson; as gran'ma says, we shall have tew fly 'round an' be in a clutter all the time tew perpare for 'em, an' finish 'Lisbeth's linen; 'sides, here's Ruth and Lois gittin' ready agin she comes."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed the girls.

"Needn't oh me. I ain't blind nor deaf. If Dick Sleeper goes tew Boston a-practisin' law with John, he ain't goin' alone, I'll be bound."

The years went by, and John kept his promise of bringing 'Lisbeth home each year, never once failing while her parents lived, and finding the old hearthstone with a happier group around it each time.

Grandmother Wilson went from this life; but the rest remained until two little grandsons climbed Mr. Wilson's knee, or ran before him, chasing butterflies over clover patches; and one little maid, the wonderment and delight of Lettice, with her father's nut-brown hair and 'Lisbeth's steady eyes, had grown to the very hearts of the household.

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